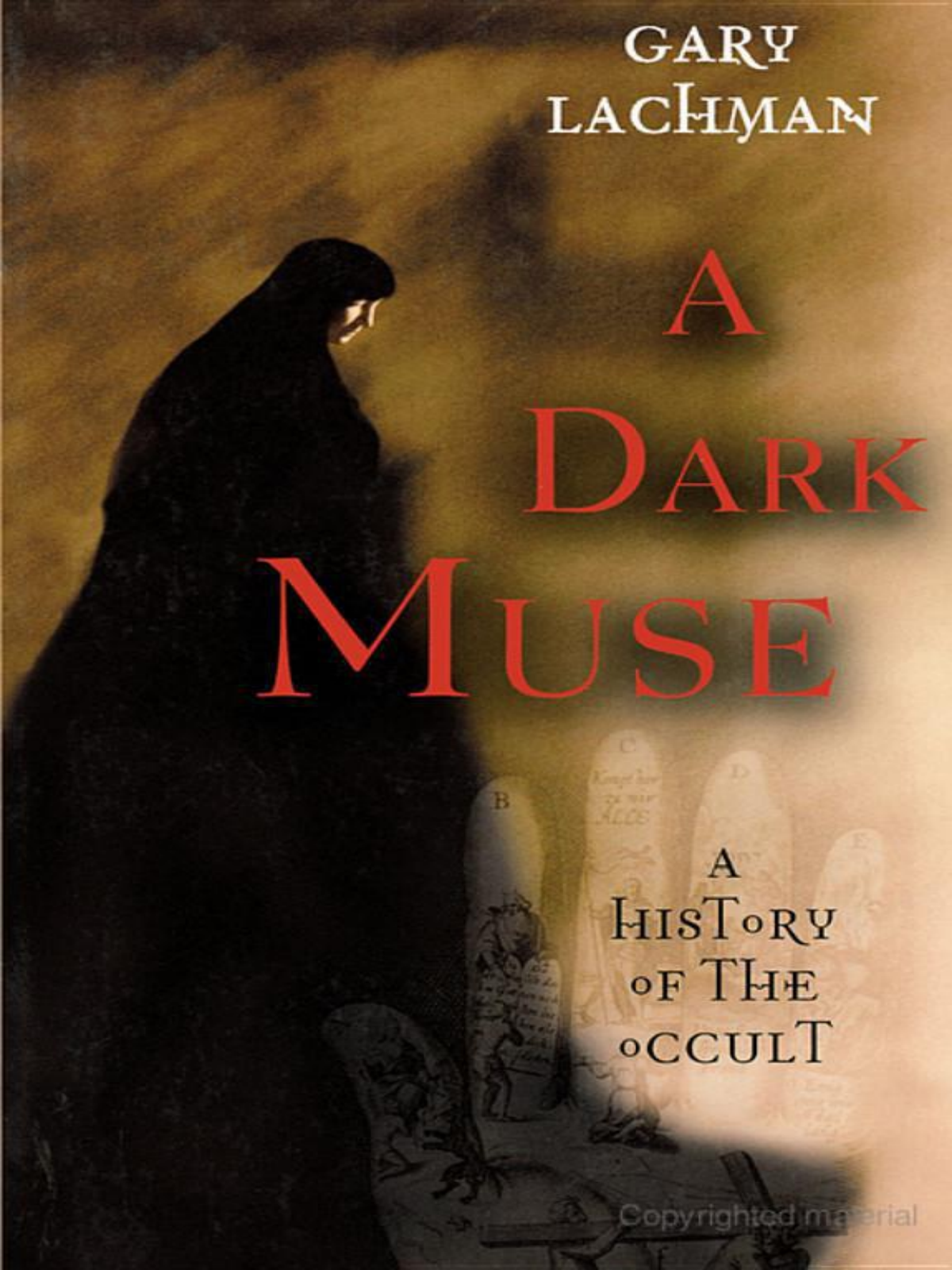
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A HISTORY OF THE OCCULT
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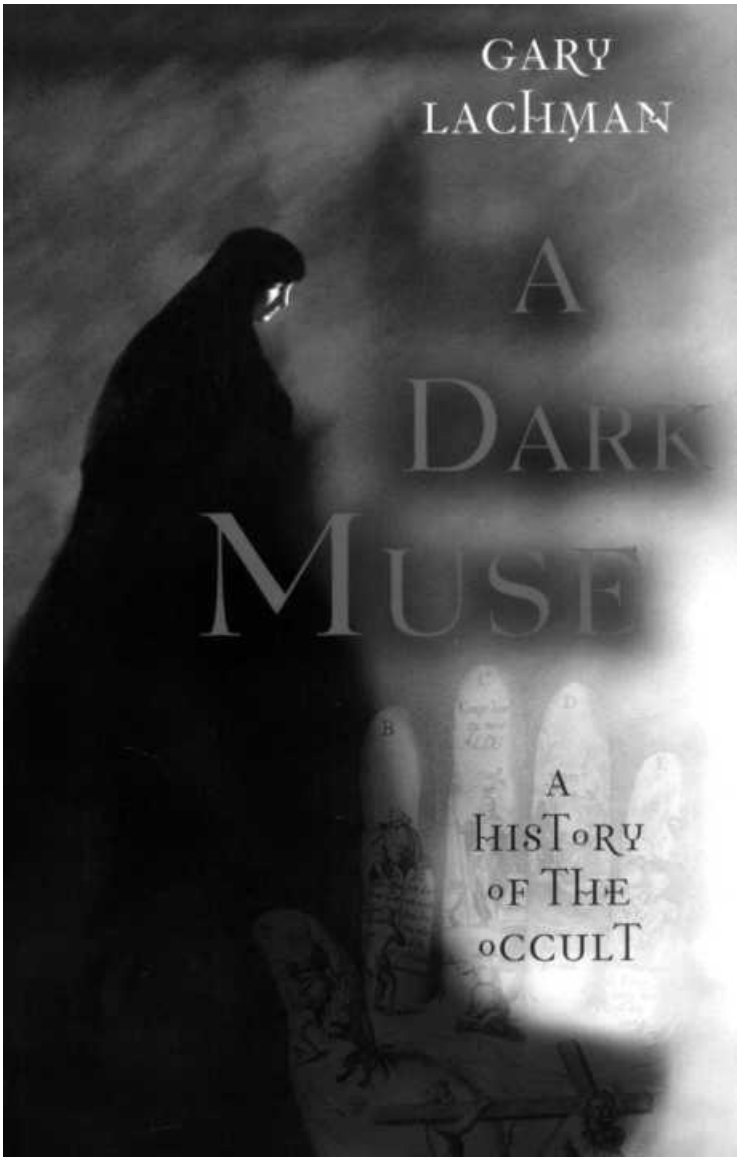
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"Initiates' wandering did not differ from ordinary travels for study except that their itinerary, though apparently haphazard, rigorously coincided with the adept's most secret aspirations and gifts ...

O.V. de L. Milosz

Part 1

INTRODUCTION

A Dark Muse

Hidden, secret, esoteric, unknown: these are some dictionary definitions for "occult." The word itself has its roots in the Latin occulo, to hide, and is linked to the technical astronomical term "occultation," as when one heavenly body obscures or "occludes" another by passing in front of it. In the popular mind however, "the occult" is an all-purpose term indicating a variety of things, from Satanism, witchcraft and tabloid horoscopes, to internet psychics and UFOs. Although not entirely incorrect, this catch-all phrase indicates the kind of deterioration language undergoes over time. The occult or "occultism" is an umbrella term for a number of disciplines and beliefs which are generally agreed to be scientifically invalid and, in practice, worthless. Erroneous and misguided at best, at their worst - in, for example, the gruesome activities of some overzealous Satanists' - some forms of occultism can indeed be dangerous. And yet, the origin of this popular notion of the occult is as occult - that is, unknown - as these practices themselves.

Although the several mystical and religious philosophies that make up the basic world view of occultism reach back to antiquity, the notion of the occult, as we understand it today, stems from relatively more recent times. Babylonian astrology, the Greek mysteries, hermetic philosophy, Gnosticism, Kabbalah, alchemy and other forms of occult thought are millennia old, but it was not until the rise of science in the late 17th century that these and other disciplines related to them became hidden and esoteric in the way they are seen to be today. Throughout the ages, the spiritual demands placed on practitioners of these arts were rigorous and hence, only the elite were allowed to engage in them, thus making them esoteric or secret to the profane. But they were nevertheless recognized as significant pursuits, worthy of respect and deference. One sign of the importance hermeticism, for example, held can be seen in the fact that in 1460, Cosimo de' Medici, patron of the great Renaissance magician Marsilio Ficino, commanded his scribe to break off translating Plato, in order to concentrate on a newly found batch of manuscripts, purported to be the work of Hermes Trismegistus himself. Not long after, Isaac Newton, father of the modern scientific worldview, would busy himself much more with his explorations of alchemy and Biblical exegeses than with the theory of gravity for which he is remembered today. Newton is perhaps the last of his breed, for with the triumph of the Age of Reason, which, ironically, he helped bring about, the occult ideas and theories which he devoted innumerable hours to, became unquestionably passe. Materialism, scientific reason, mathematical logic and an amenability to being measured - the epistemological criteria that still reign with us today - became the sine qua non of truth and any knowledge or belief that did not meet these astringent requirements was summarily jettisoned. Which is exactly what happened to the occult.

To be sure, immense gains and much profit came from this advance. But there were also many losses. One central loss was that, with the rise of scientism - the belief that the above criteria were sufficient to account for all the phenomena of existence - the sense of meaning that, in different ways, accompanied belief in religion, dissolved. Another was that with the increasing power of the metaphor of the machine - Newton's clockwork universe - the specifically human world of feelings, emotions, aesthetics, moral values and other immeasurable phenomena, were more and more seen to be illusory, or, at best, a pleasant but ultimately insignificant by-product of the purely material processes going in the human body.

The utilitarian advantages of the scientific worldview understandably occluded these more subtle considerations. Yet a sensitive minority remained troubled and sought support for their resistance. And it was at this point, I believe, that `the occult' came into existence. In it the Enlightenment figures and early Romantics who questioned the new paradigm found a body of rejected knowledge, a counter-history and alternative narrative to human existence, one that ran parallel to the increasingly successful scientistic view. And as it dealt primarily with inner, spiritual things, it was one that readily lent itself to this sensitive minority, comprised, for the most part, of artists, poets and writers. In their battle against the encroaching complete scientification of human experience, in the last few centuries poets, artists, and writers have often found considerable assistance in the strange yet sometimes oddly beautiful array of rejected knowledge that makes up the occult.

Starting with the Enlightenment and continuing on to the modern period, what follows is, I believe, a representative, though not exhaustive, survey of some of the main characters who over the last few hundred years have dipped into this magic bag, along with samples of some of the occult texts they drew out, and, glimpses of some of the figures responsible for them. What these adventurous souls came away with was often crazy, sometimes hilarious, and, on occasion, clearly insane. But it was just as often profound and, in more than one instance, possessed of a transformative, supernatural beauty .

The book is slanted towards writers and poets, but other studies, drawing on composers and artists, could tell a similar tale. Yet there is some fundamental link between magic and writing. We speak of magic spells. The grimoires of witchcraft have their roots in grammars. In ceremonial magic, reciting the correct word at the proper time determines the success or failure of the operation. Kabbalah, from which most of modern magic derives, is based almost exclusively on the secret meaning of language. And Thoth, the Egyptian god of writing, with whom the figure of Hermes Trismegistus, author of some 365 books, was linked, was also a god of magic. Clearly the power of words is shared by both the poet and the mage.

Welcome, then, to the world of the occult. And to the dreams and occasional nightmares inspired by its dark muse.

Note

1 See "Blood-drinking devil worshippers face life for ritual Satanic killing." Guardian 1 February 2002. On 30 January 2002, Daniel and Manuela Ruda were found guilty of the ritual slaying of their friend, Franck Hackert. The couple - 26 and 23 years old respectively - repeatedly hit 33 year old Hackert with a hammer, then stabbed him 66 times, before carving a pentagram on his chest, and collecting his blood to drink. When the police arrived a scalpel remained embedded in Hackert's stomach, and his body lay beneath a banner which read "When Satan Lives." The two explained that Hackert was an appropriate victim because of his mild temperament and fondness for the Beatles.

Enlightenment Occultism

It may seem a paradox to speak of an `Occult Enlightenment'. After all, the Enlightenment saw the triumph of reason and science over superstition and religious prejudice. But there is rarely a sudden and absolute disappearance of a practice or belief that has been a central part of human culture. This is especially true for magic, which has been around for millennia, and is still with us today. For the scientific account of things, the magical view had indeed been eclipsed. But for the popular mind, it was clearly present.

In the Paris of 1784, for example, alchemists, kabbalists, astrologers and other wonder workers could be found practically everywhere. Street venders sold engravings of the mysterious Comte de Saint-Germain. Booksellers hawked hefty volumes on the secret occult arts. Faith-healers and alchemical physicians did a brisk trade among the poorer classes. Newspapers ran accounts of extraordinary characters like Leon le Juif, who possessed a magical mirror, and M. Ruer, who had discovered the Philosopher's Stone. Talking dogs, a child who could see underground, men who walked on water, and reports of strange creatures like the monster with a man's face, lion's mane, bull's horns, snake's scales and bat's wings, peppered the daily press. Even eminent authorities like Restif de la Bretonne and Mirabeau accepted the idea that Frederick II had produced satyrs and centaurs via experiments with sodomy ... Magic had so firm a grip on the French popular consciousness that, according to the historian Robert Darnton, the authorities found alchemists, sorcerers and fortune tellers much better placed as spies and police informants than their usual source, the priests.' This fascination with occultism was not limited to the French, and a similar, if less extroverted appeal was exhibited across the channel, in England, as well as in other cities on the continent.

The popular press of Enlightenment France may strike us as not too dissimilar to today's tabloids; but there remained other, less suspect areas in which a more serious interest in occultism prospered. One, the central one with which this book is concerned, was literature. The other was politics. The following selection on Enlightenment Occultism aims to give some idea of how these currents came together and helped shape the culture of the time.

Swedenborg

Perhaps the greatest occult figure of the 18th century was Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), whose sober and methodical approach to the hidden mysteries set a standard too often ignored by later devotees. For most of his adult life a brilliant and prolific scientist, Swedenborg wrote an immense number of scientific studies on everything from metallurgy to the anatomy of the brain. He was also a statesman and assessor of Swedish mines, as well as an inventor of considerable talent: when given the task of transporting several ships inland across mountains, Swedenborg managed it successfully, well ahead of schedule. Many of his scientific insights were also well ahead of their time, and if for nothing else, he would be remembered for these today in his native Sweden. But in 1745, at the age of 57, something happened. A profound spiritual crisis involving weird prophetic dreams and shattering hypnagogic visions - including a visitation from Christ - shook Swedenborg's strictly scientific consciousness and launched him on a new career as a cartographer of strange inner landscapes and occult worlds. He spoke with the dead, journeyed to other planets, and most strikingly, visited heaven and hell, returning to write an immense book about what he saw there. He wrote other immense books as well, most of them explaining in a dry, scholarly style the true meaning of the Bible. Swedenborg's influence on western culture has been great; his readers have included Goethe, William Blake, Coleridge, Balzac, Baudelaire, Yeats, Strindberg and Arnold Schoenberg. What appealed to them was the air of sanity and common sense with which Swedenborg made even the most incredible pronouncements: that people on the moon speak from their stomachs, for example, or that Martians have two-tone faces. But in the same book he could speak of hell as a psychological condition, an idea which at the time seemed radical, but which today we can appreciate readily.

The standard account of Swedenborg's career has his plunge into other worlds happening out of the blue, but Swedenborg's initiation into the occult was not quite as precipitous as that. Before his voyages to heaven and hell, Swedenborg had devoted a considerable time to various occult practices: breath control,

meditation, automatic writing, as well as visionary methods based on a form of sexual mysticism. Swedenborg's links to London were many, and during an early visit in 1710, he may have joined a Jacobin Masonic Lodge. During a later visit, in 1744, there is reason to believe Swedenborg became a member of the Moravians, a secret society led by the eccentric Count Zinzendorf. Zinzendorf propagated a mystical political doctrine whose aim was to bring about the millennium by uniting Christians and Jews through kabbalism - a theme common to many Enlightenment mystics. Swedenborg was in London, staying in Wellclose Square, when his mystical experience occurred, and he may at that time have received some kabbalistic tutoring from Samuel Jacob Chayyim Falk, mentor perhaps to another Enlightenment occultist, Cagliostro. Falk, who was born into a Polish community of the followers of the `false Messiah', Sabbatai Zevi, came to England in 1742, and set up shop - literally - on the old London Bridge, which in those days was lined with houses. Here he ran an alchemical laboratory, while maintaining from his home in the East End a secret occult school. Although Swedenborg later claimed not to have studied Kabbalah, he is known to have visited Jewish districts in Amsterdam, Hamburg, Prague and Rome, and evidence from his own writings suggests a familiarity with kabbalistic thought. Loving erotic union is part of the ritual worship of the Jewish mystical community, reflecting the original creative act of the Godhead, as well as the reunification of male and female energies. In his own work, Swedenborg emphasized that in heaven, angels continue to make love, and in the Latin version of his book Conjugal Love, Swedenborg spelled out in detail methods of breath control and meditation enabling a practitioner to maintain an erection and remain within an orgasmic trance for considerable periods.2

For the literary minded, one theme stands out from Swedenborg's massive edifice: the idea of `correspondences'. This will turn up in a host of different ways in the centuries after his death, both as a central axiom of magical thinking as well as a core theme of symbolist poetry. Swedenborg argued that the physical world is rooted in a higher, spiritual world, and that correspondences exist between the two. In grasping the links between the physical and the spiritual worlds, we come closer to understanding the divine design. Swedenborg's correspondences are perhaps the most thorough expression of the alchemical axiom `as above, so below'; they are also a powerful embodiment - literally - of the idea that man is a microcosm, containing within himself the entire cosmos. In an age moving inexorably toward the `trousered ape' of Darwinian thought, Swedenborg argued conversely that man is truly made in the image of the divine, and spoke of the ultimate reality as Universal Man, the Anthropos, a theme central to kabbalistic and hermetic teachings.

In the 19th century, Baudelaire took the idea of correspondences and infused it with elements of synesthesia and the notion of the unity of the arts. But for his own time and immediately after, Swedenborg was known mostly as a prophet of a new age. The Church of the New Jerusalem, of which William Blake was a member, was founded after Swedenborg's death and preached an apocalyptic doctrine that went well with the social and political ferment brewing across Europe.

Other central figures of the Occult Enlightenment, like Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), Giuseppe Balsamo (1743-1795) - better known as Cagliostro - and the Comte de Saint-Germain (1710-1784?) weren't writers. Most balanced accounts admit there was something of the charlatan in all three. Yet it is difficult to accept this as a complete assessment of their careers, and some idea of their life and times is essential in any survey of magic in the 18th century.

Mesmer

Mesmer, who considered himself a strict scientist, began life in Iznang, a village on the German shore of Lake Constance. He studied at a Jesuit Theological School, and later registered as a law student in Vienna. He then turned his attention to medicine and in 1766 earned his medical degree with a dissertation on the influence of the planets on human diseases - evidence' that ancient hermetic ideas were still respectable in the mid18th century. Little is known of Mesmer's youth, and there is some question as to how he supported himself during his university days. In his monumental Discovery of the Unconscious, Henri

E•Ellenberger speculates that Mesmer may have been helped by secret societies. If so, this would not be unusual; the late 18th century was a time rife with secret societies and occult organizations. As the Baroness d' Oberkirch, an aristocratic socialite and intimate of mesmeric circles in Paris and Strasbourg, remarked: "Never, certainly, were Rosicrucians, alchemists, prophets, and everything related to them so numerous and so influential. Conversation turns almost entirely upon these matters; they fill everyone's thoughts, they strike everyone's imagination ... Looking around us, we see only sorcerers, initiates, necromancers and prophets.s'

Mesmer's financial problems were solved when he married a wealthy widow and set himself up in Vienna. He became a patron of the arts and his friends include Gluck, Haydn (both masons) and the Mozart family. Wolfgang Mozart - who as a Freemason and quite possibly a member of the Illuminati would be no stranger to secret societies - performed his first opera, Bastien and Bastienne, in Mesmer's private theatre.' Of Mesmer's estate, Leopold, Wolfgang's father, had this to say: "The garden is incomparable, with its avenues and statues, a theatre, a birdhouse, a dovecote and a belvedere on the summit. i5

Mesmer first hit upon his discovery while treating a Fraulein Oesterlin in 1773-1774. Fraulein Osterlin suffered from several severe.symptoms, and Mesmer noted the cycle of their appearance and withdrawal. Mesmer was aware that doctors in England had experimented with treating patients with magnets, and decided to do the same. He attached magnets to Fraulein Oesterlin's stomach and legs. She improved considerably. Mesmer came to believe that it was not the magnets alone that cured her, but his own animal magnetism. The age of mesmerism was born.

The basic tenets of mesmerism are that a subtle, physical fluid fills the universe and forms a connecting link between man, the earth and the stars; disease is the result of blockages of this fluid in the body; and techniques exist to enable these fluids to move more freely. The famous `mesmeric passes' were attempts by practitioners to help the magnetism in its flow. It's clear that while he didn't consider himself an occultist, many occultists do in fact adhere to some form of Mesmer's basic idea. A form of it is evident in much holistic healing. It is also clear that a very similar notion appeared in the 20th century in the form of Wilhelm Reich's `orgone energy'. In Reich's case, the relationship between an uninhibited, healthy flow of orgone energy and sex was unambiguous. In Mesmer's case, the animal aspect of his magnetism raised a considerable number of eyebrows.

Strangely, Mesmer's first official recognition came when he was asked by Prince-Elector Max Joseph of Bavaria to testify in an inquiry into the alleged cures of a faith healer, J j. Gassner, who performed what could only be called exorcisms. Mesmer agreed that Gassners' cures were authentic, but claimed spirits had nothing to do with it. Gassner merely succeeded through using his animal magnetism.

Like many others, Mesmer was drawn to Paris. He arrived in 1778, proclaiming his discovery. In the shadow of the Revolution, it was a strangely restless place. An unstable government, a catastrophic financial situation, widespread corruption, a weak king and a spendthrift queen, combined with reckless market speculation, gambling and loose morals to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and unease. A disastrous war with England led to a hysterical enthusiasm for the American War of Independence. It was a climate in which some sudden, radical shift was expected. Haughty, prickly and egotistical, Mesmer's domineering personality and courtly manners - not to mention his animal magnetism - helped him gain access to Parisian society. He settled in a private mansion in Place Vendome, and accounts of Mesmer's success in curing a variety of ills percolated through society. `Mesmeric baths' and a collective treatment, the banquet, became popular pastimes among the rich, ill-disposed and, often, hypochondriacal aristocracy. A mesmeric Society of Harmony was set up in 1783, adding to the already numerous secret societies; branches appeared throughout France, their aim to spread Mesmer's teachings. By 1784, his success had peaked. There were many cures, and Mesmer had several champions, yet he eventually fell foul of the scientific establishment, as much for his alleged quackery as for his success. Yet, it has to be admitted that the frequent dishabille of Mesmer's attractive female clients, the orgy-like atmosphere of a mesmeric salon, and the orgasmic-like `magnetic crisis' that signalled the start of a cure, did not produce the appearance of a sober, scientific pursuit. After a damning examination by the Academy of Sciences, including, famously, Benjamin Franklin, and his embarrassing failure to cure the blind pianist Maria-

Theresia Paradis, Mesmer's fortunes took a downward turn. He was ridiculed in cartoons and satirical plays. Although he was always able to find clients, his star had waned, and he died, embittered and alone, in his native Austria at the age of 78. Although his name has become part of the language - we speak of being mesmerized - the credit for discovering what mesmerism actually was went to his one-time disciple, the Marquis de Puysegur, who, while magnetizing a patient discovered he had put him to sleep. The term hypnotism was coined half a century later by the Englishman James Braid.

Whatever Mesmer's own fortunes, mesmerism took on a life of its own. In the hands of disciples like Nicolas Bergasse and Jacques-Pierre Brissot it took on a radical social character, propagating a variant of Rousseau's noble savage, championing primitive nature over decadent society. In various other forms it combined with spiritualism, Swedenborgianism, freemasonry, and strains of Rosicrucianism to add an esoteric and occult flavour to the edgy political climate. Freemasonry especially, which spoke of spiritual egalitarianism and universal brotherhood, seemed to embody many of the ideals which would later erupt catastrophically in the French Revolution - hence the antipathy shown it by both the aristocracy and the Church. Freemasonry had enjoyed a revival in the earlier part of the century, and in a few decades had burgeoned into a tangled nest of competing and confusing secret societies, offering ever higher and more obscure grades - with some, like the Illuminati, following a mystical/political agenda. Along with competing lodges in England, Scotland and the continent, in 1777, it received an additional mystical jolt from perhaps the most flamboyant occultist of the lot, Cagliostro.

Cagliostro

Cagliostro started life in Sicily as Giuseppe Balsamo, although there is still some dispute over whether Cagliostro and Balsamo were in fact the same man. Like Rasputin, his name elicits a vague sense of someone sinister, yet few people have any concrete idea who or what he was. Carlyle's tags of "King of Liars" and "Great Quack Face" are understandable, given that the sole source of any information about Cagliostro in Carlyle's time was the biography written by his murderers, the Inquisition. Among other claims to fame, Cagliostro was the last person executed by the Inquisition, more than likely strangled by his jailer in the Castel San Leo in Rome. The picture of Cagliostro as a spiritual swindler even hit the big screen, when Orson Welles portrayed the Sicilian mountebank in the 1949 film, Black Magic. Even Goethe, no stranger to the occult sciences, satirized him in his play The Grand Copht. Yet if Cagliostro's reputation is understandable, it is not entirely accurate. Like many occult masters, Cagliostro didn't rule out fakery if it would secure his aims. Yet those aims were often noble, and there was something about his presence that suggested a certain dominance and personal force.'

Balsamo left home in his teens after being thrown out of his seminary school for improvising on a sacred text he was reading aloud to the class: he substituted the names of local prostitutes for those of saints. For the next twenty years he wandered across Europe, practising a variety of trades: forger, alchemist, copper smelter and travelling doctor touting a borax-based skin lotion. The wandering life was common to many hermetic philosophers: Paracelsus' travels are legendary, as were Cornelius Agrippa's, and at some point during his travels, Balsamo met another 18th century occultist, the celebrated rake, Giovanni Jacopo Casanova. (Decades later, in his declining years, Casanova spitefully recalled Cagliostro as `badly hung'.) Up until his thirty-fourth year there is little to distinguish Balsamo from the other adventurers who scrambled across Europe, living by their wits and trusting in the credulity and ennui of the well-heeled for their livelihood. Then, on a visit to London in 1776, Balsamo changed his name to Cagliostro and he literally became a different person. The central cause of this transformation was freemasonry.

Balsamo had always been attracted to the occult - his days as a travelling alchemist say as much. It is even possible that he may have met Swedenborg during his first visit to London in 1772; although in his last days by then, Swedenborg was lucid until his death, the date and time of which, incidentally, he accurately predicted. Certainly by his next visit in 1776 Cagliostro was frequenting Swedenborgian circles, and possibly visiting the kabbalist Falk. But after being admitted to the Esperance Lodge of Freemasons, on 12 April 1777 at the King's Head on Gerrard Street in Soho, he adopted freemasonry as his life's mission. He

soon developed a curious new form of Masonic initiation, the so-called Egyptian Rite. Accounts differ as to how he came across this. Some say he was initiated into the Egyptian Rite by the Comte de SaintGermain. Better evidence suggests that the ubiquitous Falk was responsible. Cagliostro himself claimed that during a visit to London he discovered in a bookstall a manuscript arguing the Egyptian origins of freemasonry. This trope of the magical book appearing strangely at the right moment will be repeated several times in the history of magic: the `editor' of Bulwer-Lytton's Zanoni meets a Rosicrucian in a Covent Garden bookshop, the authenticity of the Hermetic order of the Golden Dawn stemmed from a bookstall in Farringdon Road, and Gustav Meyrink is saved from suicide by a magical pamphlet sliding under his door. Whether or not the book actually existed seems irrelevant. Cagliostro's belief in his Egyptian Rite was unshakeable, his oratorical gifts persuasive; he had found his life's calling, as well as an interesting way to make a living. Calling himself the Grand Copht - after the prophet Enoch, supposed founder of Egyptian masonry - Cagliostro took to the roads, doing the occult circuit, bringing a higher, more inspiring initiation into what had become for many a routine social club.

Cagliostro was very successful. Entering Venice, Berlin, Leipzig and St. Petersburg in his black coach covered in kabbalistic symbols, he must have been an impressive sight, as he headed for the local Masonic lodges. Yet not everyone was satisfied with his plan to heal the rifts and schisms in the craft. He received some resistance in 1784, during the general Convent of Freemasons called together in Paris by the lodge `Les Amis Reunis', otherwise known as the Philalethes, or `lovers of truth'. Cagliostro's demands that all of the lodges recognize the preeminence of his Egyptian Rite did not go down well, nor did his request that the Philalethes destroy all their records meet with much approval.

Whatever its source, Cagliostro's motives for promulgating the Egyptian Rite were noble, and for all their occult character, in keeping with Enlightenment ideals of egalitarianism and brotherhood. Like Zinzendorf and Falk, who was known to associate freely with Christians, Cagliostro's aim was to unite disparate groups under a common Masonic goal: the regeneration of mankind. With this in view, the Egyptian Rite admitted Jews and, in a radical break with Masonic tradition, women as well.

As well as a Mason, Cagliostro was something of a healer, and the transformation from fly-by-night adventurer to the Grand Copht seemed to have increased his powers consider ably. Unlike Mesmer, who was criticized for treating only wealthy patients and for ignoring the needy, Cagliostro often refused to serve the rich. In European capitals, he would head to the poor district, take humble lodgings, distribute money and treat the sick, refusing any payment. In his displays of clairvoyance, he often employed children as mediums, and it is true he resorted to trickery on occasion. Yet, there are numerous accounts of his accuracy. Baroness D'Oberkirch, who was not one of his supporters, admitted that he was right about several items he communicated to her at their first meeting, facts which he could not have known; and later, while in Strasbourg, when he announced to her the death of the Empress of Austria, the news of the empress's demise only arrived three days later. Other evidence of Cagliostro's powers was given by the Marshall von Medem, the orientalist Count de Gebelin and the Cardinal Rohan.

Mention of Rohan brings us to the `Diamond Necklace Affair'. Although Cagliostro played an insignificant part in the swindle, he was shattered by it. When the scandal broke, his reputation was in shreds, and his magnificent self-confidence never recovered. He defended himself, and was acquitted, but this was only after a year in the Bastille awaiting trial. The impression he made destroyed his reputation. In court he launched into a long soliloquy, speaking of his aristocratic parentage, calling himself "a noble voyager, Nature's unfortunate child." This drew laughter, not sympathy, and with his long hair and green taffeta coat, he cut a ridiculous figure. His life story, complete with accounts of his mystic travels in Asia, Africa and Arabia failed to impress, and he was banished from France.

Cagliostro became a wanderer again, but his bad publicity preceded him and he was thrown out of practically every place he sought refuge. Strangely, in London, where his Egyptian Rite did not draw many initiates, he wrote a Letter to the French People. It sold well in Paris, and seems in some ways to predict the coming deluge. He speaks of not returning to Paris until the Bastille is torn down, and hints at a drastic change in government. It was perhaps these prophecies that made the Vatican regard him as a dangerous political revolution. Attempting to promote freemasonry in Rome, Cagliostro was arrested and charged with

plotting to overthrow the Church, something that the Illuminati indeed had in mind. In 1789 he was thrown into prison. At the age of 52, he was executed. Reports of his death were not believed, and in 1797, when French soldiers captured the San Leo prison, they searched for him. It was not until a report ordered by Napoleon confirmed his death that the world finally accepted that the Grand Copht was gone.

Le Comte de Saint Germain

In the 18th century wit, a knack for conversation, an ingratiating manner and the ability to seem perpetually fascinating, were as much in demand as kabbalistic knowledge and alchemical skill. The man who was known as the Count of Saint-Germain, or le Comte de Saint-Germain, or, on occasion, `der Wundermann', had these qualities and, like many occultists who followed him, he purposely encouraged an air of mystery about his past. Little is known of his origins. He may or may not have been born in 1710 in Portugal, into a family of Sephardic Jews. It's also possible that he was Frances Ragoczy, a Transylvanian prince who died in SchleswigHolstein, Germany, in 1784, only to be seen five years later, in 1789, in Paris, during the Revolution. Lastly, he may still be alive today, secure in a Himalayan inner sanctum, awaiting the right moment for his return. Certainly since the 19th century he has become, like the Wandering Jew, a figure of myth, restored and revamped in different fashions to fill a place in various occult pantheons. His central occult claim was to have perfected the alchemical elixir vitae, which cured all ills and bestowed immortality. Madame Blavatsky included him among her Tibetan masters, and in more recent years the right-wing American spiritual teacher Elizabeth Clare Prophet dusted off the count and employed him as spokesman for her less than inspiring pronouncements. Indeed, if the count were alive today, he would more than likely find a comfortable niche for himself as a talk show host, or at least a frequent guest among those who are famous for being famous.

The man called Saint-Germain did possess a genuine charm and culture, as well as an impressive knowledge of chemistry and history, which allowed him to speak with authority both on alchemy and the past, and this in a way that suggested he actually did witness the events in question. He seemed to always dress in black and white, was an accomplished violinist with a good singing voice, had a fluent command of several European languages, and a knack for perfecting dyes for silk and leather. That he could also transform base metals into gold, remove flaws from diamonds, had, two thousand years earlier, invented freemasonry and hence was much older than he looked are more doubtful claims. Saint-Germain's youthful appearance may have been a result of a practice that probably accounts for his habit of not eating at the many banquets and feasts he nevertheless enlivened with his wit and acumen. It is more than likely that he was a vegetarian and genuinely did not relish the ample portions that made up the well-heeled 18th century menu. He claimed to eat only a special elixir that he prepared himself, but it is also possible that he ate a normal meal beforehand unobserved.

The first mention of Saint-Germain is in a letter from Horace Walpole in 1743, where he remarks of his appearance in London. Soon after he was expelled from. England on suspicion of being a spy for the Stuart pretenders. He then went to France and became a favourite of Louis XV, more than likely through the influence of Madame de Pompadour. Saint-Germain was an accomplished ladies' man; he would often make a present of an eau de toilette that he claimed prevented wrinkles, saying it was a small token of his esteem. Like Casanova, who thought him a charlatan (but admired his skill with the female sex) and Cagliostro - who may have received the Egyptian Rite from him - Saint-Germain floated across Europe, working as a magician, wit and spy. He was known in Vienna as a confidant of Counts Zabor and Lobkowitz, and it was in their company that he met and befriended the French Marshal de Belle-Isle, who brought him to France. Before meeting Louis XV, he moved to Holland and called himself Count Surmount; there he set up several successful factories for the ennobling of metals. In 1762 he arrived in St. Petersburg, and became involved in the conspiracy to make Catherine the Great Queen of Russia. He became a great friend of Count Alexei Orlov, and was even made a Russian general, calling himself General Welldone - whether in jest or earnest is unknown. In Nuremberg in 1774 he received the support of the Margrave of Nuremberg, Charles Alexander, and it was here that the story of his being Prince Ragoczy began. When the

margrave discovered that this particular Prince Ragoczy was dead, along with his brothers, SaintGermain had to move on. He was by now in his sixties. Luck was with him, and in 1779 he came under the protection of the landgrave Charles of Hesse-Cassel. At the landgrave's castle in Schleswig-Holstein, Saint-Germain tutored his patron in the occult sciences, a position he held for five years, until his death - or most recent disappearance - in 1784.

Descriptions of Saint-Germain range from "the completest charlatan, fool, rattle-pate, windbag and swindler" (Count Warnstedt), to "perhaps one of the greatest sages who ever lived" (Charles of Hesse-Cassel), to "a highly gifted man with a very alert mind" who nevertheless was "completely without judgment" and who gained his notoriety through "the lowest and basest flattery of which a man is capable . . ." (Count Alvensleben, Prussian Ambassador to Dresden). He was, it seems, a man of considerable culture and wit, with a sincere interest in chemistry, who used the mystification of the occult to open doors that may otherwise have remained closed. What actual contribution he made to the hermetic arts, however, is unclear.

The Unknown Philosopher

The life of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin had none of the eventfulness of Mesmer or Cagliostro, and although he moved among them, he did not try to ingratiate himself with the aristocracy as did Saint-Germain. Saint-Martin was a true hermetic philosopher, deeply concerned with mankind's spiritual destiny, a profoundly serious individual. Like Swedenborg, he had a message. He is not out to impress or mystify, but to educate and inspire. His central theme is one that will blossom with the Romantics of the next generation. Man, he tells us, is really a god, or at least has the potential to be one, a belief he shared with his contemporary William Blake. With Blake, Saint-Martin believed that the external, physical world of space and time is the result of some primeval catastrophe, a `fall' from our inherent divinity, into the limits of finitude. And like Blake, Saint-Martin sees the magician's task as the opening of the doors of perception, and a return to our birthright.

Louis Claude de Saint-Martin was born in Amboise, in the province of Touraine on 18 January 1743. His parents were pious Catholics, and although his mother died a few days after his birth, his stepmother seems to have taken her place admirably, and Saint-Martin remained devoted to her throughout his life. A frail, delicate child - he once remarked that a deficiency in his astral parts accounted for his ill-health - a book on self-knowledge that he read in his youth set him on the mystic path. Reading it he embarked on a life-long detachment from the world, and took his first steps on a voyage into the interior. He studied at the College of Pontlevoi, his father having in mind for him a career in law. Although SaintMartin completed his studies, he felt no attraction to the bar, and convinced his father to allow him to enter military life. An influential relative secured a lieutenant's commission in the regiment of Foix. Army life may seem an unusual choice for a mystic, particularly a fragile one, but in 1766, after the Seven Years War and the Treaty of Versailles, Europe was at peace, and would remain so for some time, and Saint-Martin found ample time to pursue his studies in philosophy and religion.

It was in 1767, while stationed at Bordeaux, that he met the man who would change his life. Don Martines de Pasqually de la Tour - otherwise known as Martinez Pasquales - was a follower of Swedenborg, a Rosicrucian, and the head of an order of Masonic illuminism known as the Elect Cohens - Cohen being Hebrew for priest. Pasqually's background is vague: Spanish or Portuguese, it is uncertain if he was a Christian or a Jew He was, however, a serious occultist, and his Order of the Elect Cohens practised a variant of ceremonial magic that involved number mysticism, kabbalism and a form of theurgy, the calling down or invoking of god forms. His meeting with Pasqually had the effect on Saint-Martin that freemasonry had on Cagliostro: he had found his life's calling. In 1771 he left the military and devoted the rest of his life to preaching first Pasqually's occult doctrine, and then his own form of theosophical wisdom. For the next few years, Saint-Martin travelled across France, visiting Paris, Lyons and Bordeaux; during this time he communicated with other Martinists, including the novelist Jacques Cazotte.

In 1772 Pasqually left France for St. Domingo, where, in 1774, he died in Port-au-Prince. The Martinists were left adrift, Pasqually failing to initiate them into the final reaches of their hierarchy. Rather than despair, Saint-Martin wrote the first of a number of books, Of Errors and of Truth, and in his social life he tried to pass on the truths of mysticism, while revealing the errors of the atheistic philosophy propagated by Voltaire and the Encyclopedists. These were the years of Cagliostro and Mesmer, of Jean Baptiste Willermoz and Lavater.

Saint-Martin moved among the aristocracy, and became involved with mesmeric circles in Lyons and Paris. The Lyons mesmerists were especially rich in occult influences, having in their midst Rosicrucians, Swedenborgians, alchemists and kabbalists. Willermoz, Saint-Martin's close friend, a member of practically every secret society of the time, believed he received secret messages from God, through the medium of mesmeric somnambulists. Saint-Martin helped Willermoz decode these messages, and he was also helpful to Mesmer's important disciple, Puysegur. Saint-Martin joined the Parisian Society of Harmony in 1784, but felt that Mesmer's emphasis on the physical action of his fluids strayed dangerously close to materialism, and that this could attract the attention of unwanted astral spirits.

Saint-Martin decided that the anxious climate of the time suggested caution. During his lifetime he published his works under the pseudonym of `the Unknown Philosopher.' His biographer and interpreter A.E. Waite remarks that his personal safety was a consideration: this was, after all, the time of the Great Terror. But Saint-Martin's membership of secret societies was also a reason. The ruse was pointless, and the identity of the Unknown Philosopher was soon common knowledge. Like other occult seekers, Saint-Martin travelled abroad, visiting Italy, Russia, Strasbourg and London, where he met William Law and the astronomer Herschel. August 10 1792 found him in Paris, where "the streets near the house I was in were a field of battle; the house itself a hospital where the wounded were brought." He had already been made penniless by the Revolution and, in 1794, when an edict exiled the nobility from Paris, he returned to - his birth place, Amboise. His time there was spent trying to wed his political concerns with his spiritual insights.

Saint-Martin's last years were spent in the study of Jacob Boehme, the `Teutonic Theosopher' whose ideas influenced people like William Blake and Hegel. A 17th century cobbler, Boehme had a mystical experience staring at the sunlight reflected on a pewter dish. He then claimed to see the 'signature' of things and went on to write weighty tomes in an. obscure alchemical language. Dark and profound, SaintMartin worked at unifying Boehme's vision with his earlier Martinist doctrines. He seemed to have sensed that his last days were upon him, and writing to the end, after a brief fit of apoplexy, he died on 13 October 1803. Followers of his ideas came to be called Martinists as well, causing some confusion among occult historians.

Saint-Martin's central theme is that mankind's mission is to `repair' the world. A similar doctrine appears in the Kabbalah, in which creation is the result of an overflowing of the sephiroth of the Tree of Life. Our job is to somehow clear up the mess. Walter Benjamin, an unorthodox kabbalist with Marxist leanings, saw history as an unending series of accidents, rather like an infinite pile-up on some eternal motorway. Saint-Martin would have agreed, but would not have shared Benjamin's confidence in Marxist ideology; rather he counted on our capacity to make contact with our pre-lapsarian source. Tolstoy, August Strindberg and O.V. Milosz were among his readers. Perhaps A.E. Waite provides the best description of the Unknown Philosopher:

The Unknown Philosopher ... was a man of many friends, of strong attachments ... Saint-Martin is almost the only mystic who was also in his way a politician, with a scheme for the reconstruction of society; an amateur in music; an apprentice in poetry; a connoisseur in belles lettres; a critic of his contemporaries; an observer of his times; a physician of souls truly, but in that capacity with his finger always on the pulse of the world.

Karl Von Eckharthausen

Karl Von Eckharthausen, who, with Saint-Martin and Kirchberger, Baron de Liebistorf, carried on one of the most detailed and enlightening occult correspondences of the time, is little known or read today. Aside from

students of European mysticism and Christian theosophy, the group among whom Eckharthausen receives passing interest are the readers of the notorious Aleister Crowley, the most celebrated - if that is the correct word - magician of the 20th century. It was in fact Eckharthausen's book The Cloud upon the Sanctuary that set Crowley off on his colourful, if morally ambiguous career. Crowley first came across the notion of a hidden community of spiritual adepts from reading A.E. Waite's Book of Black Magic and Pacts; in it, Waite refers obscurely to such a secret society. Crowley wrote to Waite, asking for more information. Waite suggested reading Eckharthausen. Crowley did. In his `autohagiography', The Confessions of Aleister Crowley, the Great Beast remarks that:

The Cloud upon the Sanctuary told me of a secret community of saints in possession of every spiritual grace, of the keys to the treasure of nature, and of moral emancipation such that there was no intolerance or unkindness ... their one passion was to bring mankind into the sphere of their own sublimity ... I was absorbed in The Cloud upon the Sanctuary, reading it again and again, without being put off by the pharisaical, priggish and pithe- cantropoid notes of its translator ...

What Eckharthausen himself might have thought of this endorsement is unknown, but one assumes he wouldn't have cherished the idea that as `satanic' a figure as Crowley was inspired by his devotional tract. What attracted Crowley was the idea of a secret, hidden Church, a congregation of the elect, an inner circle of adepts, devoted to the noble cause of truth. The idea appealed to Crowley's taste for mysteries, as well as his own penchant for elitism, a sensibility shared by many occultists. Crowley himself would soon join the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn; kicked out of that, he became head of another occult organization, the O.T.O., or Order Templi Orientis, then started one of his own, the Argentinum Astrum, or Silver Star. Crowley was not the only occult thinker moved by such a notion. Madame Blavatsky spoke of the Hidden Masters, secure in their Himalayan stronghold, steering man in his spiritual evolution. Ever since the Rosicrucians in the 17th century, the notion of some hidden brotherhood, devoted to mankind's spiritual growth, has been a key theme of occultist thought. In the secret society ridden 18th century, Eckharthausen's tract hit a very responsive nerve. And like the Rosicrucian myth, whether such a hidden brotherhood really existed or not was unimportant: people interested in its existence acted as if it did.

Eckharthausen's brotherhood, however, differed from the Rosicrucians in one respect. Where the authors of the Fama Fraternitas and other Rosicrucian tracts spoke of their brotherhood as an actual body, made up of definite members, as any other kind of society would be, Eckharthausen makes clear that his hidden Church is not some inner circle of, say, the exterior Catholic Church, or some society like the Freemasons. It is much more a community of like-minded souls, an idea found in Swedenborg and in 20th century occultists like RD. Ouspensky, who, in his spiritual travels, came upon a variety of individuals bearing the marks of a dawning cosmic consciousness. Like Ouspensky, for Eckharthausen, this shift in consciousness from the mundane to the mystical is both the aim of his spiritual elect, acid the sign of membership within it.

Karl Von Eckharthausen was born on 28 June 1752 at the Castle of Haimbhausen in Bavaria. Like Saint-Martin, he lost his mother at birth, but Eckharthausen's appearance in the world was a source of double sorrow. He was an illegitimate child, his mother the daughter of the overseer of the estate. His father, the count, was nevertheless very affectionate, treated him well, and gave him a fine upbringing and education. But his double loss of mother and legitimacy instilled in Karl a lingering melancholy, and, again like Saint-Martin, he early on developed a retiring attitude to the world, and a profound sense of detachment from it.

Eckharthausen studied at Munich, then went to Ingoldstadt to pursue philosophy and law. As we will see, Ingoldstadt was the base for Adam Weishaupt's notorious Masonic splinter group, the Illuminati. Weishaupt was a professor of canonical law at the university, and one wonders if Eckharthausen came into contact with Weishaupt or was, indeed, one of his students. The Illuminati were a kind of secret society behind the secret societies, and it is not too far-fetched to see in Eckharthausen's hidden Church, a more spiritual version of Weishaupt's invisible brotherhood. Eckharthausen's concerns were more religious than political, and although he speaks of a "theocratic republic," which will one day be, "Regent Mother of the whole world," Weishaupt's Enlightenment rationalism would have repelled Eckharthausen's mystical temperament.

Karl's father procured for him the title of Aulic Councillor, and in 1780 he became censor at the Library of

Munich - a perhaps enviable position for a writer - then in 1784, Keeper of the Archives of the Electoral House. According to A.E. Waite, Eckharthausen produced sixty-nine works, turning his hand to drama, politics, religion, history, art criticism, as well as his mystical and occult books. Few of these, if any, are read today, and in his own lifetime, he was most famous for a handbook of Catholic prayers entitled God is Purest Love. This went into some sixty editions in Germany and was translated into several European languages, as well as Church Latin. His influence on the mystical currents of his time was considerable. Saint-Martin remarked that he was more interested in Eckharthausen than he could express; among other things, the two shared a profound interest in number mysticism, a practice that occupied Saint-Martin in his early days with Martines de Pasqually, and to which he returned in the last decade of his life. And their mutual correspondent, Baron Kirchberger, writing to Saint-Martin, spoke of Eckharthausen as "a man of immense reading and wonderful fertility ... an extraordinary personage." It was to Kirchberger's great regret that a proposed meeting at the Swiss frontier had to be called off on account of the Councillor's health. At their meeting Kirchberger hoped to receive a communication of the Lost Word from Eckharthausen, who, we assume, had found it. Any information on what may have passed between them is, like the word itself, lost. Amiable, charitable, highly cultured and devout, Eckharthausen married three times, had several children, and died, after a painful illness, on 13 May 1813.

William Beckford

Along with mystical politics and the regeneration of the world, occultism during the Enlightenment also took on a less idealistic character and appeared in ways more concerned with aesthetics and the search for exotic and sensational forms of entertainment than with revelation. One such form was the Gothic novel. Supernatural entities, haunted castles, secret societies and evil sorcerers were the stock in trade of pioneers like Walpole and of later contributors like Radcliffe and Lewis. One early and singularly brilliant work in the genre that combined elements of occultism, the satanic and the taste for `the East' that had obsessed Europe after the publication of Antoine Galland's French translation of The Arabian Nights in 1717 was William Beckford's Vathek (1786). Written in French allegedly in a Kerouac-like burst of inspiration, Vathek brings together a variety of dark fascinations that would later become familiar to late 19th century decadents: diabolism, sadomasochism and other forms of perverse sex, orientalism, extravagant hedonism, ennui and an all-around interest in the forbidden. Where occultists like Cagliostro saw in `the East' a spiritual locale offering a greater tolerance than Catholicism, for Beckford, `the East' was the source of luxurious and inevitably debilitating pleasures. The erotic, the strange and the exquisite were the touchstones of Beckford's East, much more so than any transcendental wisdom. In the 19th century, this strain of exotic occultism would be taken up most vigorously, if there is such a thing as vigorous decadence, by the French Romantics.

William Beckford (1760-1844) became the richest young man in England when his father died in 1770. The ten year old Beckford inherited a fortune made in plantations in the West Indies. Beckford, who travelled through Europe and produced a work of travel writing, Italy, with Sketches of Spain and Portugal, never visited the source of his wealth, and this lacuna in his education caused him little regret. Like his idealized self-image the Caliph Vathek, Beckford was more concerned with spending his fortune than with appreciating the roots of it. Educated by tutors, Beckford's first steps in his journey to the east came through the influence of the artist Alexander Cozens. Born in St. Petersburg and trained in Rome, Cozens had opened a drawing academy at Bath, near Fonthill, Beckford's family seat and site of Fonthill Abbey, Beckford's fabled Gothic folly. Cozens taught Beckford drawing - his sketches can be found in his travel writings - but more important for a history of occultism, he introduced the young heir to the delights of The Arabian Nights. To a young man who could have practically anything, the exotic atmosphere of fantasy, sensuality, criminality, drugs and magic made a powerful impression, and in many ways Beckford spent the rest of his long life living out the consequences of this early influence.

Part of Beckford's excursions into decadence included, at the age of 17, an illicit attachment to William Courtenay, a ten year old boy. (That their names were the same suggests a certain narcissism.) Beckford's

passion had to simmer at a distance, however, and Courtenay met some competition from the advances of Louisa Beckford, wife of Beckford's cousin Peter. Consummation of both affairs was difficult, though not impossible. One successful venture was a pagan coming of age party that Beckford planned for himself at Christmas in 1781. Like a mini-version of De Sade's 120 Days of Sodom, Beckford, Louisa, Courtenay - secured through the help of Cozens - and a handful of other young and willing participants, locked themselves away for three days and three nights in the millionaire's estate; this birthday rave eventually became the inspiration for Vathek. Along with rare foods, rich wines, incense-clouded rooms, forbidden sex and the occasional magical ritual, part of Beckford's weekend pleasure dome included the `Eidophysikon' of Philip James de Loutherbourg, an Enlightenment version of a multi-media display or `light show'. De Loutherberg was a classically trained painter championed by Diderot; among other accomplishments he was elected to the Royal Academy at the age of 22. He later worked for David Garrick's Theatre in Drury Lane where he laid the foundations for modern scene-painting and what are since called special effects. De Loutherberg made the occult rounds: he did a portrait of Swedenborg, was a follower of Mesmer, and had met Cagliostro in 1783 at a Masonic lodge in Strasbourg, later becoming an initiate of his Egyptian Rite. De Loutherberg settled in London in 1785, lived in Hammersmith and devoted himself to mesmerism and the pursuit of the Philosopher's Stone; among other occult notables, Cagliostro was one of his guests.

After his wild weekend, Beckford's taste for oriental magic, as well as for sodomy and adultery, became well known. He frequented occult circles in London and Paris, knew the Swedenborgian violinist Francois-Hippolyte Barthelemon and the kabbalistic painter Richard Cosway. Beckford was in Paris for the early part of the crucial occult year of 1784, when the mystical tide was still rising. Later, the current would begin to ebb with Mesmer's fall, the growing antipathy to freemasonry, and Cagliostro's embroilment in the `Diamond Necklace Affair'. Yet, aside from some titillating dabbling, Beckford's contact with the occult was for the most part superficial. His one real encounter proved unsettling and closed the door on any future initiations. During his visit to Paris in 1781, Beckford made the acquaintance of the architect CharlesNicholas Ledoux. Ledoux was a Freemason and practising occultist, and his architectural style ran to the fantastic. In 1784, he and Beckford renewed their acquaintance, and Ledoux offered to show Beckford his crowning achievement, "the most sumptuous apartment I ever erected." Beckford's own architectural taste was outre and he was eager to see Ledoux's handiwork. After an hour's drive from Paris they arrived at a hidden chateau. Ledoux had explained that his client's interests were "not of the common world" and that his own appearance was "very peculiar."

After passing through several chambers, Beckford reached a splendid salon, and there Ledoux introduced him to an old man. Though of small stature, he had a powerful presence, and his odd and antique dress piqued Beckford's interest. The old man asked Beckford to regard the many works of art that adorned the room. Beckford was intrigued by a large bronze cistern, resting on a green porphyry base; it was filled to the brim with water. After studying it for a few moments, something peculiar began to happen.

As I stood contemplating the last gleams ofa ruddy sunset reflected on its placid surface (Beckford wrote in a letter to Louisa) the old man, risen at length from his stately chair, approached and no sooner had he drawn near, than the water becoming agitated rose up in waves. Upon the gleaming surface of the undulating fluid, flitted by a succession of ghastly shadows, somewhat resembling ... the human form in its last agonies of dissolution ...

The images moved quickly, but Beckford had seen enough to produce a genuine frisson. He later told Louisa that what he had seen in Ledoux's apartment reduced "to insignificance all Loutherberg's specious wonders," and that the phantasmagoria "froze" his "young blood." His reactions, however, did not ingratiate him with Ledoux and the mysterious old man. After remarking that "This is most frightfully extraordinary," a shaken Beckford was led away, apparently having failed the test. Passing out of the inner sanctum, Beckford caught a glimpse of a candle-lit chamber, and heard the low sound of voices chanting. When asked what was taking place, an impassive Ledoux remarked that the place was dedicated to a "high, but not entirely religious purpose." It's conceivable, as Joscelyn Godwin speculates in The Theosophical Enlightenment, that Ledoux, through Loutherberg, saw Beckford as a potential ally - or more likely patron - of some secret society, and brought him to the threshold of initiation. Beckford, however, was an inveterate

dilettante, and to him henceforth the portal was closed. After this unsettling experience, Beckford apparently lost all interest in the occult.

Jacques Cazotte

Most readers of occult literature know of Jacques Cazotte through the story of his remarkable prediction of the fates of several of the aristocracy and intelligentsia at the hands of the Revolution. The tale turns up in most books on prophecy or clairvoyance. In 1788, Cazotte was present at a dinner party given in Paris by the Duchesse de Gramont. One of the guests, Guillaume de Malesherbes, a minister and confidant of Louis XVI, proposed a toast "to the day when reason will be triumphant in the affairs of men." A day, he added ruefully, "which I shall never live to see."

Cazotte, responding to Malesherbes' remark, rose from his seat and announced that he was wrong. "You, sir," he said, "will live to see that day. It will come in six years." Cazotte then went on to say that the Revolution was soon approaching, and that the lives of everyone in the room would be profoundly affected by it.

Naturally, everyone wanted to hear what would happen. Jean de la Harpe, a staunch sceptic and radical atheist, was intrigued by Cazotte's confident manner, and quickly wrote down his reply. He intended to produce his notes later, in order to show how wrong Cazotte had been, and to prove once again that prophecy was mere superstition. As it turned out, La Harpe's notes, discovered after his death in 1803, are the strongest evidence for the accuracy of Cazotte's vision.

Cazotte regarded his fellow guests and told them what was in store. The Marquis de Condorcet, a celebrated philosopher and proponent of progress would, Cazotte announced, die on the floor of a prison cell, after taking poison to avoid execution. When Condorcet replied that such fate had little to do with an age of reason, Cazotte replied that nevertheless, his suicide would take place during such a reign. A favourite of Louis, Chamfort would, Cazotte went on, cut his veins several times, but not die until some months later. Dr. Vicq d'Azyr would be assisted in a similar fate, having his veins opened by someone else. The astronomer jean Bailly would die on the scaffold, a victim of the mob, as would MM. Nicolai, Roucher, and Malesherbes. Even their host, the duchesse, would meet her end in the same way, along with many other of the ladies present.

After hearing this, La Harpe asked about himself. He, Cazotte replied, would not die, but would instead become a Christian: to the atheistic La Harpe, a fate perhaps worse than death. When asked about his own future, Cazotte likened himself to the man who, during the siege of Jerusalem, walked about its walls crying "Woe to Jerusalem," only to be crushed in the end by a stone from a Roman catapult.

Within six years everything Cazotte had said became true. Condorcet poisoned himself in a prison cell. When threatened with arrest, Chamfort tried to kill himself, but bungled the job, and later died at the hands of the doctor treating his wounds. Dr. Vicq d'Azyr avoided the guillotine by having his veins opened by a fellow prisoner. The rest were guillotined, and La Harpe, horrified by the carnage of the Revolution, entered a monastery and became a devout Catholic. Cazotte, an ardent royalist, was not however killed by a Roman catapult, but executed by the tribunal in 1792 after plans he had made for a counter-revolution had fallen into the wrong hands. Before any of this had come to pass, La Harpe had mentioned Cazotte's prediction to many friends, and Baroness d'Oberkirch records in her memoirs that she had come across the story in 1789. As for the reign of reason that Cazotte assured Malesherbes he would live to see, as Christopher McIntosh makes clear in Eliphas Levi and The French Occult Revival, by 1792, a number of `cults of reason' had sprung up in revolutionary France, the aim of which was to take the place of the detested Church.

Jacques Cazotte was born in Dijon in 1719, and was educated at a Jesuit College, in preparation for a career in law. After qualifying in 1740, he went to Paris to enter the Marine Department of the civil service, and while there became part of several literary circles and salons and wrote his early works. His official duties kept him occupied with various posts on land and at sea, and during the war of the Austrian

Succession, he was involved in naval campaigns against the English.

Between 1747 and 1759, Cazotte moved back and forth between France and the island of Martinique in the Caribbean, enduring ill health, miserable conditions, financial problems, official mistreatment and a general run of bad luck. Back in France, in 1760, Cazotte's luck turned, and he was saved from ruin by inheriting a large house in Pierry, near Epernay, from his clergyman brother. There Cazotte married, had three children, and remained for the rest of life, which he devoted to being an amateur litterateur. One of the works he produced during this time was The Devil in Love.

Most of Cazotte's works deal in some way with the weird, the strange and the occult, and his interest in these was not strictly literary. At some point in the 1770s he became involved in the Martinist lodges following the teachings of Martinez de Pasquales. It is unclear if he joined after Pasquales' death; if so, he may have been initiated into the order by SaintMartin, and if that is the case, he may have been a Martinist of a different stamp. He was clearly a close associate of the Unknown Philosopher, to the extent that Madame la Croix, Saint-Martin's confidant, became a member of the Pierry household, assisting Cazotte in seances and other occult experiments. As Brian Stableford suggests', the occult atmosphere of The Devil in Love is light and playful. However serious Cazotte may have taken his Martinist beliefs, he is concerned here with entertaining. Indeed, Cazotte's tonguein-cheek presentation of ceremonial magic may have been influenced by Saint-Martin's rejection of the theurgic practices of his teacher. Although affirming the efficacy of ritual, Saint-Martin eventually discarded it as dealing solely with inferior realms. Cazotte published The Devil in Love in 1772, and rewrote parts of it at different times, so although he may have started work on it years before meeting Saint-Martin, his association with the Unknown Philosopher could have influenced the work.

That association came to an end in 1789, a year after his famous prediction. Cazotte, the royalist, could not abide Saint-Martin's brief admiration for the ideals of the revolutionaries - one shared and soon dropped by many Enlightenment occultists. Cazotte was by this time well known as an occultist, and his last work, Arabian Tales, written as a kind of sequel to The Arabian Nights, is in the tradition of exotic occultism inaugurated by Galland's translation and developed in the Romantic years by other occultists like Gerard de Nerval. The Devil in Love, though light fare, links the practice of magic to eroticism, a union that went through several permutations in the following centuries. That the devil appears here both as a beautiful woman and a camel suggests the dangers present in sex and the heathen East. Yet any moralizing on the part of Cazotte - and the different endings he wrote and rewrote suggest that Cazotte himself was unsure what the moral of the fable is - can be excused in a work that contains the overwhelmingly poignant line "Ali Biondetta - if only you were not that hideous dromedary."

Jan Potocki

That sex and the East were linked to magic was not something to put off another Enlightenment occultist. To the eccentric Pole, Count Jan Potocki (1761-1815), the three were a positive attraction. Most English readers know Potocki as the author of The Manuscript Found in Saragossa, one of the strangest works of 19th century literature. Modelled on The Arabian Nights, The Saragossa Manuscript, as it is often called, is a weird farrago of stories within stories, with an overall supernatural bent. Over a period of 66 days, Alphonse van Worden, a young Walloon officer, recounts his adventures amidst gypsies, kabbalists, demons, corpses, astrologers, the Wandering Jew, secret societies and obliging oriental ladies. As Potocki's single masterpiece, The Saragossa Manuscript alone would be sufficient evidence of its author's eccentricities. Yet Potocki's own life, as well as that of his great work, have a history far stranger than most fiction.

Born in one of Poland's wealthiest aristocratic families, by the end of his life, Potocki had become something of a superman. A famed traveller, ethnologist, linguist and fantasist, Potocki combined Enlightenment rationalism with a Romantic appetite for the strange and uncanny. His many accomplishments include an ethnographic excursion to Mongolia (following journeys to Tunisia, Egypt,

Turkey and Morocco), the first balloon flight over Warsaw, fluency in eight languages (including the secret patois of the Circassian nobleman), opening the first free reading room in Poland, a period of service with the Knights of Malta (including a sea battle against the Barbary pirates), and a quest for the original manuscript of the Arabian Nights. In between all of this, Potocki found time to devote himself to writing, as well as to a profound study of occultism. He also found himself embroiled in the mystical political intrigues that made Europe in the days before the Revolution a warren of secret societies and esoteric enclaves.

Among the many cities to which Cagliostro brought his Egyptian Rite was Warsaw, where he opened a lodge in 1780. By this time, a powerful splinter group had emerged within the Masonic fold. On 1 May 1776, Adam Weishaupt, a professor of canonical law at Ingoldstat University in Bavaria, gave birth to his brainchild: the Illuminati. Drunk with the elixir of Enlightenment rationalism, Weishaupt had a vision of a free, egalitarian Europe, rid of the tyranny of the monarchies and the Church. To achieve his end, Weishaupt inaugurated a secret society. He then became a Freemason, in order to appropriate the lodges' vast network of contacts and hierarchies. His disciples quickly infiltrated most other lodges, which were already filled with members of various other secret secret societies. (The situation resembles somewhat the plot of Chesterton's The Man Who was Thursday) Cagliostro, it is believed, was an early convert to Weishaupt's cause, and it is possible that at least some of the activity of his Egyptian Rite initiations included drawing in potential new followers. It's possible that Potocki was initiated into Cagliostro's Warsaw lodge: it's clear at any rate that he was a Mason. If so, and if Cagliostro was sifting his initiates for new recruits, then Potocki was certainly the kind of man he would target.

Two factors suggest this indeed may have been the case. One is Potocki's passion for anything Islamic. Like William Beckford, - an early reading of the Arabian Nights proved decisive; Potocki spoke fluent Arabic, and after his visit to Constantinople, the Count often dressed in burnous and fez. This is significant, not only in the general sense of `the East' as a metaphor of mystery and exoticism, but in the more specific sense that, among the many eminent figures that Weishaupt claimed were initiates in the Illuminati, Mohammed figures largely. The fact that the prophet himself was a member of Weishaupt's society would certainly have piqued the young Count's interest.

Stronger evidence for a connection between Potocki and the Illuminati however is The Saragossa Manuscript itself. Throughout his life Potocki advocated an inconsistent array of political beliefs; but in the atmosphere of preRevolutionary Paris, like many others, he more than likely shared in the hope that a new Golden Age was about to dawn. An activist by nature, participation in a society dedicated to help bring this along would have appealed to him. Secret knowledge and scenes and motifs of initiation run through The Manuscript Found in Saragossa. One of its central figures, the Great Sheikh of the Gomelez family, is the head of a gigantic scheme that in many ways resembles the machinations of Weishaupt. Sentiments of tolerance, egalitarianism, universal brotherhood, and what we today would call multiculturalism - all part of the Illuminati platform - are evident throughout the book. Other `evidence' is the fact that Potocki set his adventure in Spain. With his formidable erudition, Potocki may have been aware of earlier, Spanish Illuminist sects, like the Alumbrados, or `Illuminated Ones', who began in Guadalajara in the early 1500s. The Alumbrados believed in an "illumination by the Holy Spirit" and persisted until the Inquisition suppressed them in 1623, accusing them, among other things, of practising sexual perversion. He may also have been aware of another sect of `Illuminated Ones', the Roshaniya, who flourished in Afghanistan also in the 1500s. Like Weishaupt's Illuminati, the Roshaniya aimed at gaining political control by upsetting the status quo; for some authorities, there is a possible connection between the Roshaniya and another Islamic secret society, the 11th century Assassins. Here Potocki's love of Islam would have forged a link.'

All this is speculation. What's not in doubt are the genuine occult themes that appear throughout The Saragossa Manuscript. I can only mention some of these. The gallows that the young Alphonse finds himself under after his night of passion with Emina and Zubeida suggest the Tarot trump of the Hanged Man, a symbol of spiritual death and initiation. The weird adventures and tales within tales, in which Alphonse is unsure whether he is awake, dreaming or under the influence of hashish, is a reminder of the ambiguous nature of reality. They take place within the liminal space between sleep and consciousness, the hypnagogic realm of magic and the paranormal. Several well known occult figures appear: Apollonius of

Tyana, Knorr von Rosenroth, and Simon Magus. Several `doublings' too: the Celestial Twins, invoked by the student kabbalist, suggest alchemical themes of integration as well as the esoteric notion of the doppelganger or astral body. Many of the doublings are of a sexual nature, suggesting strange erotic practices. Alphonse's encounter with Emina and Zubeida, whom he meets in a cellar, indicates the uncertain territory he is about to enter. These delightful but possibly dangerous twins are `subterraneans', creatures of the underworld. They are also devotees of a strange, foreign faith.

One motif that Potocki shares with William Beckford, whose Vathek he would surely have known, is a stairway of 1,500 steps. In Beckford's Arabian nightmare, the steps lead upward, to the top of Caliph Vathek's hubristic tower. In Potocki, they lead down, into a cave and the underworld. Here Potocki alludes to the central secret society of European legend: the Rosicrucians. In Rosicrucian legend, Christian Rosenkruz, the mythical founder of the society, was buried in 1484, in a hidden tomb, after dying at the age of 106. In 1604, the tomb was said to have been discovered and, inside, his uncorrupted body lay in a seven-sided vault, lit by a powerful lamp. The Rosicrucians were hermeticists, kabbalists and alchemists; one of their tracts promise that anyone coming forth to join them would receive "more gold than both the Indies bring to the king of Spain." The gold they meant, however, was not the vulgar metal, but a more spiritual kind. The cave Alphonse finds himself in is illuminated by many lamps; there he finds a massive vein of gold and the tools necessary to extract the precious metal. Each day he digs out a quantity equal to his own weight. The gold he extracts is surely Rosicrucian, and the fact that Christian Rosenkruz received his occult wisdom in Damascus would be another enticement for the Islamophile Potocki.

The count's mystical proclivities, however, did not save him from a macabre fate. The collapse of the Illuminati, suppressed in 1785, along with the entire Masonic project, filled Potocki, as well as many of his contemporaries, with despair. The Revolution had turned into a charnel house, with the dictator Napoleon rising out of the slaughter. Personal scandal troubled him too; incest was mentioned in connection with his divorce from his second wife. Alone in his castle on his Podolia estate, ill health, boredom, melancholia and disillusionment led to morbid fantasies. The thought that he had become a werewolf obsessed him. Potocki is said to have taken the silver knob of a sugar bowl, filed this into a bullet, then had it blessed by his chaplain. Then, on 20 November 1815, he put the barrel of his pistol in his mouth and pulled the trigger. A sad end to a man whose brilliant masterpiece - full of tolerance, curiosity and a lively interest in the beliefs of other cultures - displays the best virtues of the occult Enlightenment.

The Illuminati

Of the many branches that grew from the Masonic tree, none gathered as much calumny as Adam Weishaupt's Bavarian Illuminati. Founded on 1 May 1776, two months before the American Declaration of Independence, Weishaupt's dreams of an egalitarian Europe, as well as his means of fulfilling them, were soundly crushed less than a decade later. In 1785, both freemasonry and the Illuminati were outlawed by the elector of Bavaria. The ostensible reason for their suppression was the suspicion that the Illuminati were implicated in an Austrian plot to subvert Bavaria and bring about its annexation to the House of Hapsburg. But a general uncertainty about the political ideals of freemasonry, mixed with sensational, if exaggerated `exposes' of some of the society's beliefs and practices, as well as personal revelations about Weishaupt, created an atmosphere inimitable to secret societies of any kind. By 1789, when the aims of universal brotherhood and freedom began their descent into the Terror, esoteric groups of any sort had acquired a bad reputation.

If it's true that in actual practice the Illuminati achieved appreciably little, it's also true that in myth they have exerted an influence on modern occult thought equal to the Knights Templars, Rosicrucians and Freemasons, with all of whom they have been linked at various times. It's one of the ironies of history that this should be the case, because in its inception, the Illuminati was in fact an opponent of all mysticism and occultism, seeing in these the very obscurantism it was created to combat. Weishaupt (1748-1830) was a fanatical rationalist, dedicated to annihilating religion and other superstitions, which he saw as leaden constraints on the . human mind. Perhaps his early instruction in a Jesuit college implanted this hatred; if so,

it also instilled an admiration for his instructors' organizational skills. Weishaupt's scheme was in many ways a gigantic oxymoron: he adopted the strict hierarchical forms of religious orders and mystical societies, in order to promote a philosophy of rational egalitarianism. Perhaps it was this internal contradiction, and not the elector of Bavaria, that brought about the society's downfall.

Weishaupt's skill at political machination began early, during his university years, when he intrigued his way into coveted positions. It was also then that his taste for disciples and need to dominate began to appear. As J.M. Roberts in The Mythology of the Secret Societies suggests, an early reading of accounts of the Pythagoreans and the ancient Greek mysteries piqued an appetite for initiations, rites and trials. This led naturally to freemasonry. But at the first portal, Weishaupt was turned away, mostly because he couldn't afford the dues. Undeterred, his answer was to form his own society.

Weishaupt's original goal was to break the iron grip the Jesuits had on Bavaria, which in an increasing enlightened Europe, remained in an intellectual Middle Age. Soon, though, his plans grew, until they were encapsulated in a succinct and, to the persons in question, distinctly dangerous formula. The Illuminati would work toward a future in which:

Princes and nations shall disappear without violence from the face of the Earth, the human race will become one family and the world the abode of reasonable men. Morality alone will bring about this change imperceptibly ... Why should it be impossible that the human race should attain to its highest perfection, the capacity to judge itself? ... this revolution shall be the work of Secret Societies.

A year after starting the Illuminati, Weishaupt tried again to join the Freemasons. This time he was successful, entering a Strict Observance lodge. Thus began his infiltration into the elder society. His aim was to select the more enlightened members of the craft, and to slowly introduce them to Illuminist ideology. It met with some success. Taking the code name Spartacus, with his associates Baron von Knigge and the bookseller Johann Bode, Weishaupt's influence reached across Bavaria, setting up Illuminist camps in several Masonic lodges. Munich and Eichstadt became centres for Illuminist training, and in many other lodges Illuminist ideas penetrated the Masonic orthodoxy. True to his Jesuit upbringing, Weishaupt justified his less-than admirable means by pointing to the desirable end, and his success seemed to corroborate this. Beyond Bavaria the order reached to central and southern Germany and Austria; Italy, Grenoble, Strasbourg and Lyon felt its influence. Mozart, Schiller and.Goethe were absorbed, and there was talk in Vienna that Joseph II would soon be too. By 1782 it had about three hundred members, and in the next year, it reached Bohemia and Milan, with Hungary soon to follow Oddly France, no stranger to secret societies, resisted incursions.

Things began to unravel when Baron Knigge and Weishaupt quarrelled. Knigge was an altogether more mystical soul than Weishaupt, having been a Mason and a member of other secret societies when recruited into the Illuminati. It was in fact his failure to enter a Rosicrucian sect that interested him in Weishaupt's Order: the promise of secrets and hidden knowledge attracted him powerfully. Knigge brought in many new members, but when his advance along the Illuminist path seemed oddly stalled, he confronted Weishaupt, who, rather than lose a talented convert, revealed the real plan of the society. Weishaupt gradually gave way to Knigge's increasingly more mystical designs, a development totally at odds with his initial aims. Eventually, Weishaupt decided that Knigge would have to go. The Baron did, but not before revealing the society's secrets to its opponents.

Other problems cropped up. Masons not attracted to Weishaupt's revolutionary designs began to speak openly against the Illuminati. Dark rumours circulated. Less circumspect Illuminists spoke about the inequities of kings and princes. Like today, suspicion that members of the order had already infiltrated the government was widespread. Disaffected members warned of the society's hideous plans. The newspapers called for action, and on 23 June 1784, the citizens of Bavaria were forbidden to belong to any secret society of any sort. A deluge of publications denouncing the Illuminati appeared, along with a trickle of pamphlets defending the Freemasons and distinguishing them from Weishaupt's perfidious association. These did little to stem the anti-esoteric tide. Less than a year later, another edict appeared, specifically condemning the Illuminati and Freemasons. Governments across Europe followed suit and turned a wary

eye upon the orders.

In the years that followed, a mass of evidence - some credible, most of it hysterical rubbish - appeared, linking freemasonry in general and the Illuminati in particular to a number of plots to subvert European civilization using, among other methods, violent means. Weishaupt's declaration that the revolution he had in mind would be a moral one and that the old regime would "disappear without violence" was, not surprisingly, ignored in the mass paranoia. By the time of the Revolution, if any had ever paid heed to this proclamation, they now saw the real outcome of Illuminist politics. Conspiracy theories are not limited to our own time and place. By 1789, for the popular mind, secret societies were behind the convulsions rocking France.

The most influential proponent of the conspiracy theory approach to the Revolution was the splenetic Abbe Barruel, a priest and ex-mason who had escaped the Terror by taking refuge in England. In a daunting four volume work, Memoires pour sevir a 1'historie dujacobinism (Memoirs Illustrating the History ofJacobinism) (1797), Barruel revealed the secret sinister plots against the monarchy and Church hatched in Masonic lodges across the continent. For most readers the sensational style, impressive detail and persuasive conviction obscured the fact that the Abbe was, for the most part, making it all up. Years later, in Nightmare Abbey (1818), poking fun at the Gothics, Thomas Love Peacock would use Barruel as the source of Scythrop Glowry's ludicrous "passion for reforming the world." Peacock's friend Percy Shelley, however, was enthralled by Barruel, reading the Memoirs repeatedly, and in another historical irony, developing a passionate belief in Weishaupt's ideals, the condemnation of which was the aim of Barruel's book.

Shelley's fascination with Barruel grew out of his love for secret societies - a long fragment remains of a story about the Assassins - and he was more than likely moved by passages such as:

The name of Illuminee which this Sect ... has chosen, is of ancient standing in the annals of disorganizing Sophistry. It was the name which Manes and his disciples first affected, gloriantur Manichaei se de caselo illiminatos. The first Rosicrucians also, who appeared in Germany, called themselves Illuminees ...

Later Romantics like Gerard de Nerval and Fernando Pessoa would also trace this occult family tree, and a species of mystical genealogy remains a standard trope in popular books of the genre.

Barruel's masterwork is no dry factual account:

At an early period of the French Revolution there appeared a sect calling itself Jacobin, and teaching that all men were equal and free! In the name of their equality and disorganizing liberty, they trampled under foot the altar and the throne; they stimulated all nations to rebellion, and aimed at plunging them ultimately into the horrors of anarchy ... Whence originated these men, who seem to arise from the bowels of the earth, who start into existence with their plans and their projects, their tenets and their thunders, their means and ferocious resolves; whence, I say, this devouring sect? Whence this swarm of adepts, these systems, this frantic rage against the altar and the throne, against every institution, whether civil or religious, so much respected by our ancestors?

The answer is out of the bosom of freemasonry. We've seen that to some degree, freemasonry in some forms housed some elements of radical politics, or rather that some Freemasons were also enlightened in a social and political sense. Also, in the years running up to the Revolution, enlightened intellectuals like Voltaire, d'Alembert, Diderot, and Helvetius (a central source for Weishaupt's worldview) did meet in a kind of secret academy, modelled to some degree on a Masonic lodge. Masonic lodges provided a milieu in which members of different social strata could meet on equal terms, the aristocracy with the bourgeoisie, a characteristic that the impecunious Mozart in Vienna appreciated greatly. And freemasonry in the late 18th century was characterized by a high intellectual prestige, freedom of thought, and a curiosity about new ideas. The Grand Orient Lodge of France numbered Voltaire, Bailly, Helvetius and Danton among its members. But freemasonry en masse was not an agent of the Revolution. Likewise, at the time of the Illuminati scandal, secret societies with the opposite intent existed as well. In Prussia, for example, Masonic Rosicrucianism sought to distinguish itself from the Illuminati and its radical politics, warning of its roots in deism, and calling for a renewed resistance to rationalism, egalitarianism and irreligion. And Weishaupt

was not the only character eager to appropriate the Masonic network for his own ends. The Jesuits wanted to as well, as did the followers of Mesmer, Swedenborg, Saint-Martin and other occultists; it was not until their influence was felt that freemasonry took on its mystical character. Yet for the average citizen, these distinctions made little impact. The hidden hand of freemasonry was the evil genius behind the collapse of the ancien regime, and its sinister agents were still at work, plotting further mayhem.

Barruel was aware that Weishaupt's association with freemasonry was purely mercenary, and that the Illuminati's occult trappings were a kind of sheep's clothing cloaking the radical wolves. Yet, Barruel seemed to believe that although antithetical, Weishaupt's and the original Illuminati housed identical threats:

He must have had some notion of the antient Illuminees, for he adopted their name, and the disorganizing principles of their horrid system. These notions were strengthened, without doubt, by his favourite application to the disorganizing mysteries of Manichaeism ... But, perfect atheist as he was, and scorning every idea of a God, he soon despised the twofold God, an Antient Illuminism, and adopted the doctrines of Manes only in as much as they threatened every government, and led to universal anarchy ...

Among other fascinating, if unbelievable, accounts, Barruel tells his readers of his own harrowing experiences in his confrontation with the order. "During the last twenty years," he writes, "it was difficult, especially in Paris, to meet persons who did not belong to the society of Masonry." He goes on:

I was invited to a dinner at a friend's house and was the only profane in the midst of a large party of Masons. Dinner over and the servants ordered to withdraw, it was proposed to form themselves into a lodge, and to initiate me. I persisted in my refusal, and particularly refused to take the oath of keeping a secret, the very object of which was unknown to me. They dispensed with the oath, but I still refused. They became more pressing, telling me that Masonry was perfectly innocent and that its morality was unobjectionable: In reply I asked whether it was better than that of the Gospel. They only answered by forming themselves into a lodge, when began all those grimaces and childish ceremonies which are described in books of Masonry, such as Jachin and Boaz. I attempted to make my escape, but in vain ...

Fearing he would not be allowed to leave unless he submit, Barruel gave way, but not before he was assured that he would not be asked to do anything that would go against his conscience. At that point the brethren gathered round him, and the initiation began:

At length the Venerable with the utmost gravity put the following question: `Brother, are you disposed to execute all the orders of the Grand Master, though you were to receive contrary orders from a king, an emperor, or any other sovereign whatever?' My answer was `No.' `What? No?,' replies the Venerable with surprise! `Are you only entered among us to betray our secrets! Would you hesitate between the interests of Masonry and those of the profane? You are not aware then that there is not one of our swords but is ready to pierce the throat of a traitor.'

At which point, Barruel tears off his blindfold and shouts his defiance.

Immediately the whole lodge clap their hands in sign of applause, and the Venerable compliments me on my constancy. `Such men are for us, men of resolution and courage!'

`What,' said I, `men of resolution! And who do you find who resist your threats! You, yourselves, gentleman, have not all said YES to this question: and if you have said it, how is it possible that you can persuade me that your mysteries contain nothing against honour or conscience?'

The tone I assumed had thrown the lodge into confusion. The brethren surrounded. me, telling me I had taken things too much in earnest, and in too literal a sense: that they had never pretended to engage in anything contrary to the duties of every true Frenchman, and that in spite of all my resistance I should nevertheless be admitted. The Venerable soon restored order with a few strokes of his mallet. He then informed me that I was passed to the degree of Master, adding, that if the secret was not given to me, it was only because a more regular lodge, and held with ordinary ceremonies, was necessary on such an occasion. In the meanwhile he gave me the signs and passwords for the third degree, as he had done for the other two. This was sufficient for me to be admitted into a regular Lodge, and now we were all brethren.

As for me, I had been metamorphosed into apprentice, fellowcraft, and master, all in one evening ...

At some later point in his membership, Barruel did receive the final initiation, and was made privy to the central Masonic secret. He describes the revelation in the third person. After an apprentice had taken his oath, the Abbe tells us, "the Master said the following words to him: `My dear brother, the secret of Masonry consists in these words EQUALITY AND LIBERTY; all men are equal and free; all men are brethren." This formula, he tells us, was later expanded to mean "the twofold principle of liberty and equality is unequivocally explained by war against Christ and his Altars, war against Kings and their Thrones!"

William Blake

William Blake (1757-1827) is not usually considered an occultist. For a long time, the standard view of Blake was that he was a natural mystic, naive in the Romantic sense, unintellectual, primitive, and uninfluenced by book learning of any sort. Although his `prophetic books' were thought incomprehensible, in some ways he was considered a `simple' poet; poems like "The Tyger" and others from Songs of Innocence and of Experience still turn up regularly in anthologies of childrens' poetry. Yet the image of Blake as a kind of unlearned genius, singing his songs as unselfconsciously as a bird, is wrong. Even if we plump for Blake as an 18th century shaman, we are still somewhat off the mark. He was, of course, inspired; Blake considered himself a prophet, and accounts of his visionary experiences, both by himself and those by others, are clear evidence that he had some strange faculty for perceiving what he called the spirit world, and which we today would consider expressions of the unconscious. Yet, as the late poet and Blakean scholar Kathleen Raine makes clear, it is a mistake to think of Blake as "an example of the spontaneous manifestation of archetypes." In books like Blake and Tradition (1968), Raine argues persuasively that Blake saw himself as a poet in the hermetic tradition, drawing on the rich underground stream of ancient magical and occult knowledge, and hammering out in his didactic and aphoristic verse a new synthesis of what she calls the "perennial philosophy." Yet Blake was not only an astute student of the occult thinkers of the past. The London Blake lived in was awash in the same currents of magical thought and radical politics that flooded France, and the research of scholars like Marsha Keith Schuchard suggests that the image of Blake as a kind of holy man, aloof from the influences of his own time, is inaccurate. Though not mad, as some of his contemporaries believed, Blake certainly confessed to some eccentric beliefs, and it would not be wholly mistaken to see him in the company of those we might consider crackpots, cranks and charlatans.

Blake's natural affinity to mystical visions and paranormal events surfaced early; as a young boy he was beaten by his father for saying he saw angels in a tree, and on another occasion he was saved from a second beating only through the solicitations of his mother. Throughout his life friends and associates commented on Blake's distracted air; there is evidence that at times his visions interfered with his capacity for work (as an engraver) and he may, like other visionaries (C.G. Jung comes to mind), have experienced at least one nearpsychotic episode. Blake's confidence in the truth of his visions (the earliest perhaps a sighting of God at the age of four in Soho) led him to reject the rationalist psychology that would label such things madness and to explore alternative accounts of reality. Blake is important in the history of occultism because he stands at the threshold of the radical split between the scientific and hermetic worldviews that ushered in the 19th century. Unlike his contemporary Goethe, Blake did not try to keep united these sundering visions of mankind and the world. Blake was not anti-intellectual, but he knew that the rise of scientism - the belief that the methods and vocabulary of science can eventually account for the whole of reality - spelled disaster for the spiritual in man. Against the rising trend to explain man's interior world in terms of sensory impressions and associative psychology - Locke's tabula rasa - Blake declared instead that the imagination was the source of all, and that the physical external world of the senses was a mere shadow of the infinite realms within. In different ways in the 19th century writers as disparate as Bulwer Lytton, Eliphas Levi, Arthur Rimbaud, W.B. Yeats, Blake's first editor, and many others would carry on this struggle, basically restating in their individual ways Blake's original hermetic insight. It is, in fact, the central Romantic theme. Blake is doubly interesting in this sense because, although a man of the Enlightenment, he was practically unknown during his own life, and only came to prominence in 1898 through the efforts of

Yeats and his fellow editor, E .J. Ellis. Thus, as we will see, Blake, the forerunner of the Romantics, became a public figure and prophet at a time when the inheritors of his visionary flame had nearly burned themselves out, and his great cause of the imagination had dwindled to a decadent withdrawal from the world.

Blake's earliest influence - aside from the visitations of angels - was the Bible, but growing up in a family of dissenters, it was not unusual for him to be drawn to interpretations of holy script that ran counter to the orthodox account. His first introduction to Swedenborg may have been through his older brother James; in any case, in a dissenting household a variety of unorthodox beliefs were probably readily available. That Swedenborg spoke soberly and persuasively about visits to heaven and hell no doubt interested the young mystic. It is even possible that Blake may have seen Swedenborg; in 1772, the last year of his life, the magus of Stockholm lived in a lodging house in Clerkenwell. Blake would have been fifteen then, and could very easily have come across the philosopher.

In 1783, the Rev. Jacob Duche, ex-Chaplain to the Continental Congress, started the London Theosophical Society, a radical Swedenborgian group. Along with Blake its members include William Beckford's friend Philip de Loutherberg, the Swedish alchemist and Freemason Augustus Nordenskold, and Blake's fellow artists John Flaxman and William Sharp. Earlier I remarked on the similarity between Blake's ideas and those of Saint-Martin. It's possible the two met, as both SaintMartin and Cagliostro visited the group in 1787. Ironically, if Blake and Saint-Martin did meet, then of the two, Blake was truly the unknown philosopher, suffering neglect and obscurity throughout his life.

Blake would have known of De Loutherberg's `Eido- physikon' as well as his work at David Garrick's Theatre in Drury Lane; as his biographer Peter Ackroyd suggests, it is possible to see the influence of De Loutherberg's stage magic in Blake's dazzling illuminated books. Blake knew other `magical' artists as well. Richard Cosway was one of Blake's teachers at Par's Drawing School in the Strand. He was also a practising magician, blending mesmerism, Kabbalah, ceremonial magic, drugs and ritual nudity in his devotions. (Oddly, Cosway, unknown today, was very successful in his time, and famous as much for his extravagant dress and enormous self-regard, as for his nicknames the Macaroni Painter, `Dicky' and Billy Dimple.) Swedenborg we know spoke openly about sex, and Blake's work, both his poetry and art, is suffused with a robust mystical eroticism as well as a Michaelangeloesque glory in the human body. But it is possible that he, and his devoted wife Catherine, professed a more than symbolic belief in the power of the naked body. His patron Thomas Butts was fond of telling the story of coming upon William and Catherine in their summer house in Lambeth and finding them in the nude. Blake is supposed to have said "Come in! It's only Adam and Eve." They had been reciting passage from Paradise Lost in their own Garden of Eden. Blake was also known to busy himself with erotic drawings depicting a variety of combinations and practices.

With the painter Henry Fuseli, a close friend and supporter, Blake shared a love for the erotic, the Gothic and the sublime, as well as an openness and interest in the Semitic races, something he had in common with his contemporary esotericists. Another occult artist who met Blake late in his life was John Varley, a practising astrologer and `zodiacal physiognomist'. With Varley Blake conducted a series of seances during which he saw and drew the visionary heads of the famous dead: Socrates, Mahomet, Voltaire and Richard Coeur de Lion were among Blake's astral sitters. (It was also then that he saw his eerie "Ghost of a Flea.") This was not Blake's first encounter with astrology and heads: in 1791 he had executed a series of engravings of heads based on Lavater's philosophy of physiognomy, selections from which were published in issues of The Conjuror and The Astrologer's Magazine.

Blake's other occult influences were literary. There was Swedenborg of course. But, as The Marriage of Heaven and Hell suggests, Blake came to reject central elements in Swedenborg's teachings. These were replaced by his deep study of Paracelsus and Jacob Boehme. (It will be remembered that Saint-Martin was also a profound reader of Boehme.) A wandering scholar and physician, like Blake, the 15th century alchemist Paracelsus rejected orthodox beliefs and accepted doctrines, disregarding the experts and trusting in his own instincts and natural insights. In many ways, Paracelsus is the patron saint of the Romantic`s; his central belief is that the truth of the universe lies in the human imagination, an insight that inspired Blake's life long "mental fight" against materialism and repression. From Boehme Blake absorbed

the vision of the Universal Man - something Swedenborg professed as well - and the belief that the whole of existence is engaged in a perpetual creative conflict between will and desire or, as later philosophers would put it, being and nothingness. Blake declared that "Without Contraries there is no Progression" and his work is full of immense striving, a sense of cosmic struggle and labour.

Blake was also attracted to the neoplatonic thought of Thomas Taylor. A bank clerk and mathematician, Taylor was obsessed with Plato, and taught himself Greek in order to read him and the other classical authors. Like Blake Taylor opposed Newton and materialist science, and it interesting to remark that neither Blake nor Taylor could have known of Newton's own obsessive pursuit of occult knowledge. Newton's volumes of Biblical exegesis and alchemical study did not come to light until the twentieth century. In lectures given at the house of Blake's fellow painter John Flaxman, Taylor introduced Blake to the notion of the prisca sapientia, the `primal wisdom' first brought to man through Orpheus, Hermes, Zoroaster, then later continued via Plato, Plotinus, Proclus and Iamblichus. As in the work of the contemporary Neoplatonist John Michel, much of this wisdom is couched in mathematical and geometric forms, with which Blake had some difficulty. Taylor apparently once tried to teach maths to Blake, who was notoriously recalcitrant, and it is telling that Blake's style is all Old Testament and Gothic, and lacks the principle of geometric balance, order and restraint that we recognize as classical. Mention of John Michel brings us to Blake's fascination with ancient Britain, with the megaliths and "druid stones" that had recently come to popular attention through the work of William Stukeley. Like contemporary New Agers, Blake believed that the Ancients possessed a wisdom and a knowledge lost to us, a capacity for spiritual vision and life that was quickly fading in the triumphant rise of science. And like today, the London of his time was populated with a collection of societies interested in reviving the ancient practices and embodying the lost wisdom; Blake himself was at the centre of one, playing guru to a group of artists who called themselves `The Ancients', because of their fascination with the art of the golden past, a conduit to which they found in Blake's own work.

Notes

1 Robert Darnton Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969) p. 34.

2 For the material on Swedenborg, Cagliostro and Falk, I am indebted to Joscelyn Godwin's brilliant study, The Theosophical Enlightenment (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) pp. 94-97, and to Marsha Keith Schuchard's seminal essay "Yeats and the `Unknown Superiors': Swedenborg, Falk and Cagliostro", in Secret Texts: The Literature of Secret Societies (New York: AMS Press, 1995).

3 Darnton pp. 70-71.

4 Mozart's interest and involvement in Enlightenment occultism was profound; in 1789, he attended a fancy dress party in Vienna, dressed as a Hindu philosopher, and handed out esoteric riddles in the form of sayings of Zoraster. On a more serious note, his music is suffused with Masonic themes, most notably in his initiatory, Illuminati-inspired opera, The Magic Flute as well as his Masonic Funeral Music. See my article "Concerto for Magic and Mysticism" in The Quest Vol. 90, #4 July-August 2002.

5 Quoted in Henri E Ellenberger, The Discovery of the Unconscious (London: Fontana Press, 1994) p. 58.

6 The Baroness D'Oberkirch has this to say about him: "While not actually handsome, his face was the most remarkable I've ever seen. His eyes, above all. They were indescribable, with supernatural depths - all fire and yet all ice. It seemed to me that if any two artists sketched him, the two portraits, while having some slight resemblance, might yet well be totally dissimilar. Ambivalent, he at once attracted and repelled you; he frightened you and at the same time inspired you with insurmountable curiosity." Cagliostro, she said, "was possessed of a demonic power; he enthralled the mind, paralyzed the will."

Another aristocrat, the Baron de Gleichen, remarked that: "Cagliostro was small, but he had a very fine head which could have served as the model for the face of an inspired poet. It is true that his tone, his

gestures and his manners were those of a charlatan, boastful, pretentious and arrogant, but ... his ordinary conversation was agreeable and instructive, his actions noble and charitable, and his healing treatments never unsuccessful and sometimes admirable: he never took a penny from his patients."

7 In his introduction to the Dedalus edition of Judith Landry's translation.

8 For a longer account of Weishaupt's illuminated predecessors, as well as a history of The Manuscript Found in Saragossa, see my article "The Mystical Count" in Fortean Times #140 November 2000.

Romantic Occultism

`Romantic' and `Romanticism' are both highly ambiguous terms providing a confusing array of definitions and usages. In his important study Classic, Romantic and Modern (revised edition 1975), the cultural historian Jacques Barzun lists some ninety differing and contrasting uses of `romantic': most, since the collapse of Romanticism itself as an artistic and cultural movement, harbouring a pejorative meaning. To most people today notions of magic or the occult are highly `romantic', meaning they are unrealistic, mere fantasies, dreams and products of the imagination. The fact that for the popular mind the imagination is seen as the source of error and unreality shows how far our own modern consciousness is from the Romantic sensibility. With William Blake, Paracelsus and other hermetic thinkers, the Romantics saw the imagination as the central source of existence, the fundamental creative power, and the most god-like of human faculties. In many ways the Romantic Movement, begun by Wordsworth, Coleridge and Goethe in the last years of the 18th century, and carried on in different forms into the mid 19th century by European and American writers, poets and artists, was a defence of the imagination against the encroaching reductionism of science. In its battle against superstition, scientific thought, the great liberator of the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment, had unburdened the human mind of a number of chains. Yet in the process of `freeing' man from the falsehoods of religion and the constraints of political and social oppression, it had reduced his stature considerably. The rationalism and materialism that did away with religion left man little more than a mechanical toy, a puppet pushed and pulled by the impersonal forces of nature.

Although it was clearly a reaction against the-Enlightenment, Romanticism did share many themes with its predecessor. The rights of the individual, fought for by the Enlightenment, became, under the banner of Romanticism, a belief in individuality itself. Individuality, personality, subjectivity were positive goals, because it is only as a true individual that man could experience freedom, and not be merely the atomistic recipient of an abstract `right'. In a society moving, even with the best intentions, towards total rationalisation, where the unique human being would be reduced to his function in an harmoniously operating system, the Romantic individual recognized a dangerous levelling, and opposed his own uniqueness to uniformity and mass production. For the Romantic, this individuality expressed itself most powerfully in the artist, the unique `creative genius', although it often settled for the unusual and idiosyncratic. This focus on the uncommon led, as one historian put it, to "an apotheosis of the strange and bizarre, the eccentric and weird, the demoniacal and reckless."' We have already seen an obsession with the eerie and exotic in the oriental and Gothic craze of the late 18th century. These remained, but the Romantic added to them an exploration of the workings of the mind. It is no surprise that in his massive history of the unconscious, Henri F. Ellenberger includes a lengthy examination of Romantic poetry and literature.

If the Enlightenment occultists can be said to have worked, however unsuccessfully, toward a revolution in society, envisioning a world of religious tolerance and universal brotherhood, after the Terror and the rise of Napoleon, the Romantics shifted the scene of the battle. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake all shared in the glow of the Revolutionary dawn; yet when the bloodbath began they, and others, pulled away in disgust. It would be easy to see this as a retreat into quietism; but that in itself is a safe, reactionary response. The Romantic rejection of politics was not a retreat, but an advance into a more exciting, unknown and dangerous world: the mind. It was, as the critic Erich Heller calls it, "a journey into the interior." In one of his many aphorisms Novalis remarked "We dream of journeys through the universe - is not the universe in us? We do not know the depths of our mind. The mysterious path leads inwards. Eternity with its worlds, the past and future are in us or nowhere." More than a century later, the poet Rilke, a late Romantic and early modernist, would formulate the same theme more briefly: "Nowhere," he said, "will the world exist but within."

Many factors led to this development. The early roots were in the Protestant Reformation, which emphasized the individual's personal relationship to God. Another source was the rise of the modern novel. Samuel Richardson's Pamela, published in 1740, taught Europe how to daydream, thus preparing the way for the Romantics.' There had been earlier novels, like Robinson Crusoe and Don Quixote. But Richardson's prolonged account of an infinitely attenuated seduction prompted readers to plunge into an imaginative reconstruction of lives much like their own, only more interesting, and not tales of `long ago and

far away.' One result of this opening of the inner worlds was an exploration of the odd quirks and characteristics of the unconscious and irrational, best exemplified in Coleridge and DeQuincey's fascination with dreams, somnambulism and other manifestations of the dark side of the mind. Another was a renewed interest in the occult tradition of the Counter-Enlightenment.

With the exception of Goethe, the Romantics can be seen as a great, though failed, experiment in the history of western consciousness. With them and their descendants, the union of artist and magician reaches its most clear expression. With them, however, also arises the dangers of a too total rejection of the mundane and everyday, in favour of magical realms and other worlds. It's not surprising that the poet and mage should be linked: both use words in order to produce a desired effect, and as magic moved more and more away from the medieval sense of controlling angels and demons, and closer to the kind of visionary powers we've seen in William Blake, the distinction between the two seemed one of mere terminology. By the time of Arthur Rimbaud and the early Symbolists, the distinction itself is pretty much lost, with the poet becoming the new high priest of the mystical religion of Art. Yet with the complete fusion of art and magic, the religion of Art begins its decline. The following section traces the Romantic notion of the poet as magician from its earliest inception in Germany, through perhaps the greatest occult fiction of 19th century English literature, to its late blossoming in the work of the French Romantics, who prepared the way for decadence and the fin de siecle.

Goethe

That Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Germany's greatest poet, had an interest in the occult is clear from Faust. Based on an historical character, the original Faust legend goes back to medieval times and prior to Goethe's there were earlier dramatic renditions of the tale, notably Christopher Marlowe's. Yet it is to Goethe's Faust (Part I 1808; Part II 1833) that most of us turn when we think of pacts with the Devil, of things Mephistophelean, and of the dangers of a too obsessive pursuit of knowledge and arcane secrets.

The historic Doctor Faust was born in Knittlingen, Wurt- temberg, in 1480, and died at the hands of the Devil in Staufen, near Freiburg, in 1539: at least according to the plaque that adorns Staufen's Lion Inn, the scene of the doctor's demise. According to Melanchthon - friend of Martin Luther - Faust studied magic and the occult sciences at the University of Cracow, in Poland; similar courses of instruction were also given at the Universities of Salamanca and Toledo. In Cracow Faust reportedly scoffed at the miracles of Jesus, and loudly boasted that he could repeat them at any time. Though many were scandalized by these remarks, others were impressed; years later, while lecturing on Homer at the University of Erfurt, Faust allegedly invoked the spirits of Achilles, Ulysses and Hector to entertain his students. According to the Abbot Johannes Trithemius, Faust had good reason to boast of being "the most accomplished alchemist that ever lived. ,3 Nevertheless, a Franciscan monk implored Faust to give up his black arts and to return to the Church. Faust informed the monk that this was impossible, as he had already sold his soul to the Devil; and as the Devil had kept his side of the bargain, Faust intended to keep his. There are reports of Faust's powers of prediction and other wonder working - he was reportedly kept in the employ of Baron Anton von Staufen, and forced to produce artificial gold - and stories about the Devil accompanying him as his `familiar' in the form of a dog.

The first Faust book appeared in 1587; written in German, it told the story of Faust's pact with the Devil, and of his bizarre adventures. It was something of a bestseller, and within a few months it appeared in several different pirated editions. By 1588, the story had crossed the English Channel; there it received a more serious and eloquent treatment by Christopher Marlowe. In 1593, soon after Marlowe's murder., a troop of English actors brought a production of the Tragical History of Doctor Faustus to Germany. Through some metamorphosis, the tragedy became a comedy, and the comedy was then transformed into a puppet show. It was more than likely in this form that the young Goethe first came upon what would become his most famous work.

In the medieval legend Doctor Faustus is a conceited braggart, who meets his comeuppance through a

rash pact with the Devil. In Goethe's hands, the too obvious cautionary tale becomes an archetype of western consciousness, and a powerful symbol of the perils of a one-sided development. Goethe contributed a new term to describe the growing modern sensibility: Faustian, meaning an insatiable, hubristic hunger for knowledge at whatever cost, a desire to penetrate into the innermost regions of life, regardless of the consequences. In the Decline of the West (1918), the historian Oswald Spengler divided the course of human history into three periods: the Classical, the Magian and the Faustian. Writing little more than a century ago, Spengler saw the last period as our own; and, as the title of his book suggests, he recognized it was on its way out.

Goethe's interest in magic, the occult and hermetic thought began early, and although it went through many changes, it remained with him throughout his life. He begins his autobiography, Dichtung and Warheit (Poetry and Truth) (1811-1812) with an account of the astrological backdrop to his birth:

My horoscope was propitious: the sun stood in the sign of the Virgin, and had culminated for the day; Jupiter and Venus looked on me with a friendly eye, and Mercury not adversely; while Saturn and Mars kept themselves indifferent; the moon alone, just full, exerted the power of her reflection all the more, as she had then reached her planetary hour.'

At the time of Goethe's birth in Frankfurt-on-Main, in the not too-distant city of Mannheim, alchemy was still popular. Although experimental science had been encroaching on alchemy's domain for nearly a century, it had not yet completed its colonization. As late as 1787, the Berlin Academy investigated the claims of a Professor at Halle who was said to have transmuted base metals into gold. While scientists scoffed at such claims, the fact that they felt obliged to investigate them suggests that alchemical notions had not yet been completely ousted from the popular mind. In Mannheim, at any rate, alchemy was still a favourite pastime: many of the leading citizens had alchemical laboratories, and the craze was so wide spread that the city authorities had to ban it. As with much alchemical activity, a great deal of this was prompted by the promise of quick riches, yet, in the part of Germany where Goethe was born, a deeper motivation was at work. German Pietism was strong in Frankfurt, and much of the Pietist doctrine had its source in the writings ofJacob Boehme. Boehme, as we've seen, was a central figure for 18th century occultists like Saint-Martin and William Blake, and his works presented a form of Christian mysticism couched in alchemical language. As Ronald Gray in his book Goethe the Alchemist (1952) suggests, it's probable that where Pietism was strong, some notion of the spiritual value of alchemy was also present.' In any case, by the time the teenaged Goethe returned to Frankfurt from his studies in Leipzig, he was drawn into the occult milieu, and had embarked on an intensive study of alchemical writings.

He was introduced to alchemical literature by his friend and spiritual mentor, the Pietist Fraulein von Klettenberg, with whom he began a serious study of hermetic authors like Paracelsus, Basil Valentine,J.B. van Helmont and George Starkey. Goethe's belief in the efficacy of alchemy, however, had a more than intellectual basis. Goethe had returned from Leipzig suffering from a kind of nervous breakdown, and the condition lingered well after his return, troubling him and exasperating his parents. Fraulein von Klettenberg belonged to a Pietist circle, one of whose members was a Dr. Metz. Along with a charming and ingratiating manner, Metz spoke mysteriously of a "Universal Medicine" that cured all ills, a claim, we've seen, made for the alchemical elixir vitae. Metz also spoke allusively of certain kabbalistic and alchemical books through the reading of which one could discover the means of producing this universal medicine oneself. Although he doesn't say it openly, with his hermetic knowledge and occult medicine, Metz seems to fall into the profile of a Rosicrucian, one of whose tasks, as we've seen, was to act as a kind of travelling physician, tending to the sick of body and soul. Goethe, at any rate, met that criteria, and soon after being introduced to von Klettenberg's circle, his condition worsened. He was, it seemed, near death and his mother, also a member of the Pietist group, beseeched the mysterious Metz to use his miracle drug. As Goethe writes:

In this last extremity my distressed mother constrained the embarrassed physician with the greatest vehemence to come out with his universal medicine. After a long refusal, he hastened home at the dead of night, and returned with a little glass of crystallised dry salt, which was dissolved in water and swallowed by the patient. It had a decidedly alkaline taste. The salt was scarcely taken than my situation appeared relieved; and from that moment the disease took a turn which, by degrees, led to my recovery.'

Impressed by Metz's wonder drug, Goethe remarks that, "I need not say how much this strengthened and heightened our faith in our physician, and our industry to share in such a treasure. "

After his cure, Goethe began his alchemical studies in earnest. Von Klettenberg already had a small alchemical laboratory set up in her house, and soon after Goethe set up one of his own in his parents' attic. A furnace, a retort, some alembics and a sand bath were put to the service of producing the liquor silicum, or `flint juice', made from melting down pure quartz flint with a mixture of alkali, and which was supposed to result in a transparent glass, which dissolves on exposure to air, and displays a perfect clarity. This liquor silicum would serve for Goethe as the alchemical `maiden earth', the virgin prima materia upon which further operations could take place. Yet, diligent though he was, Goethe had to admit that however thorough his preparations, the result was never as pure as he had hoped, and he eventually halted his experiments.

Goethe's interest in practical alchemy faded, but not his passion for occult literature. Following his studies with Fraulein von Klettenberg, Goethe plunged into the depths of Jacob Boehme, Swedenborg, Thomas Vaughan as well as many other, lesser known luminaries. He was particularly drawn to the alleged writings of Hermes Trismegistus, the patron saint of alchemy. The notion of transformation, so crucial to his own ideas about evolution and the metamorphosis of plants, which predated Darwin, remained key, and it was through his interest in alchemy that Goethe became particularly interested in the Rosicrucian legacy. A fragment entitled Die Geheimnisse (The Mysteries), written between 1784 and 1786 - the years in which he first began his botanical studies - was intended to be a poem about the Rosicrucians. For Goethe, the rose and cross was a powerful symbol of the unification of opposites, a central alchemical concern. One Rosicrucian work that Goethe read with evident interest was the Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz, most probably written by the alchemist and hermeticist Johann Valentine Andrea. Andrea (1586-1654), a Lutheran theologian, was responsible for other Rosicrucian tracts, like the Fama Fraternitas, which appeared in Germany in 1614, announcing the existence of the secret brotherhood, and calling for serious seekers of spiritual truth to join them. One well-known applicant was the philosopher Rene Descartes, who was dismayed at his inability to locate any members of the sect. Sceptical friends suggested this was not unusual as the Rosicrucians claimed to be an invisible society; later, troubled by reports that he himself was a Rosicrucian, Descartes appeared before his friends and declared that as they could see him quite well, he could not possibly be a member of the hidden lodge.

Goethe read the Chymical Wedding in 1786, many years after his alchemical experiments. But its effect was considerable. He wrote to his friend Charlotte von Stein that after reading it he felt that "there will be a good fairy tale to tell at the right time, but it will have to be reborn, it can't be enjoyed in its old skin." The fairy tale told at the right time seems to have been Goethe's Mdrehen, The Fairy Tale of the Green Snake and The Beautiful Lily.

The Marchen, or literary myth, is a peculiarly German form. Novalis, who included a similar tale in his novel Heinrich von Ofterdingen, called the Marchen "a dream vision ... beyond logic ... an assembly of wonderful things and happenings ... a pregnant chaos." Alchemical symbols and themes abound in Goethe's tale, first published in a collection called Conversations of German Emigrants in 1795. The `conversations' are a cycle of stories told by the aristocracy that had been driven from their homes during the years of the Terror, and had fled to Germany to avoid the guillotine. Appalled by the horrors of the Revolution, Goethe had hoped to show how the principles of harmony, the unification of opposites and the disinterested appreciation of beauty could provide the basis for a new, spiritually whole society. Needless to say, Goethe's vision of a new Europe came to naught. Along with Andrea's Rosicrucian fable, another influence were the Letters on Aesthetic Education of his friend Friedrich Schiller. In his letters, Schiller argued that the truly free individual could arise only through the harmonizing of both the sensual and the rational aspects of the personality, a unification of Geist and Natur a theme that would occupy many thinkers of the time, like Hegel, Coleridge and Heinrich von Kleist. Goethe agreed with Schiller, but believed that his own contribution to the cause could only be put forth in more poetic, symbolic forms. The result was the beautiful, though not immediately comprehensible, Fairy Tale.

Goethe himself was not forthcoming with interpretations of the story. He remarked that it "will remind you of

everything and of nothing," and said that he would reveal its true import only after "99 others had failed to do so." Others certainly have tried. Ronald Gray devotes a chapter to the alchemical exegesis of the Mdrehen, and in Goethe and the Philosopher's Stone (1965), Alice Raphael offers ajungian reading of the tale. In terms of esoteric influence, however, perhaps the greatest interpreter has been the early 20th century Austrian philosopher, educator and architect, Rudolf Steiner. Steiner's `supersensible' reading of this and all of Goethe's work is at the centre of his occult system, anthroposophy, whose headquarters in Dornach, Switzerland is a massive citadel of Expressionist architecture, called, appropriately enough, the Goetheanum. However, whether one accepts Steiner's, or any other interpretation, Goethe's tale is undoubtedly reminiscent of the dream-like, mystical and obscure allegories at the heart of alchemical literature.

Novalis

If one word encapsulates the essence of German Romanticism it is Sehnsucht. Langenscheidt's German-English Dictionary translates this as "longing, yearning, hankering, pining, languishing, nostalgia," but there is really no strict English equivalent. `Unfulfillable' or `inexpressible' longing perhaps come closest, but there is something in the original German that is distinctly lacking in any English translation. Sehnsucht conjures up horn calls far off in the dark forest, the poignant glow of the sunset, which we will never reach, no matter how quickly we race to the horizon, the snow-capped peaks of a distant mountain range. Beauty, distance, and the sense of something infinitely desirable just beyond our grasp: it is perhaps in music that we can feel its full effect, yet on a coarse and profane level we can see pornography as an everyday example of this poetic condition'. These willing and available women stimulate an appetite they can never gratify. And like pornoaddicts, the Romantics who succumbed to Sehnsucht eventually discovered it was very difficult, if not impossible, to deal with an actual world of flesh and blood. In the end many of them found themselves stranded between an imaginary realm of infinite beauty, which nevertheless slipped through their fingers, and a concrete reality which invariably proved too much for their sensitive natures to endure.

One poet above all is associated with the idea of Sehnsucht, the ultimate symbol of which became the illusive `blue flower' of his unfinished novel Heinrich von Ofterdingen (1800). Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg - better known as Novalis, Latin for `newly ploughed field' and his mother's maiden name - was born on 2 May 1772 (less than two months after Swedenborg's death) on the estate of Oberwied- erstedt, not far from Halle, on land acquired by a branch of his ancient family in the 17th century. His father, Baron Heinrich Ulrich Erasmus von Hardenberg was a strict convert to Count Zinzendorfs Moravian Brotherhood, and enforced a sombre and joyless regimen of piety and religious observance. A humourless character, Baron von Hardenberg refused to speak with his neighbours, considering trivial talk unChristian. His relations with the wider world were equally curt: a story tells of his once reading of the French Revolution in a newspaper; the reports of atheism and other antiChristian sentiments enraged him, and he threw the paper down, vowing never to look at one again, a pledge by all reports he assiduously kept.

Novalis's mother, however, was affectionate and indulgent, and did her best to shield the young poet and his siblings from their father's wrath. Novalis grew up, as many poets do, in isolation, wandering through his family's mansion and estate on the Harz river, alone with his thoughts and the landscape. A sickly child, in many ways Novalis' early years resemble those of Saint-Martin and Karl von Eckharthausen. As his translator Arthur Versluis remarks "perhaps it was just this isolation, this childhood in which (he was) left to (his) own devices, which began to disclose the manifold inner world to Novalis ..."s The rigid and rarely interrupted routine of the outer world was compensated for by a burgeoning complex interior realm, a shifting scenery of myth, early poetic intuition and magical realities.

Arguments with his father eventually exiled Novalis from his home - a common predicament that would be later mirrored in the poet's cosmic loneliness: perhaps the most well known of Novalis's aphorisms reads, "All philosophy is homesickness." He moved to his uncle's estate in Lucklum, where the library was a welcome change from his father's devotional tracts. In 1791 he left to study law at Jena, where he was a student of Schiller, and in 1793 he read mathematics, chemistry and philosophy at Wittenberg, where he

became friends with the philosophers Friedrich Schlegel and Johann Gottlob Fichte. It was also at this time that he met the twelve and half year old Sophie von Kuhn, who played a tragic Lolita to Novalis' not-quite middle-aged Humbert Humbert.

Novalis was immediately struck by Sophie's beauty, and reports are that others who met her shared his enthusiasm. But it is difficult not to find something morbid in the 24 year old Novalis' obsession with a girl just reaching puberty, although he was not alone in such predilections: the equally romantic and even more morbid Edgar Allan Poe married the thirteen year old Virginia Clemm at the age of 26.

Novalis kept his engagement to Sophie a secret, fearing his father would object to their marriage: more on the grounds of Sophie's humble background than on their age differences. His father, however, was uncharacteristically taken with the girl, which says much for her charm, and consented to their union. Sadly, fate conspired against Novalis, and in November 1795, Sophie fell seriously in, with a tumour of the liver. By spring of 1796, her condition had improved, but by the summer it declined, and an operation was necessary. Others followed, but were unsuccessful, and, after a long, agonizing struggle, she died in March of 1797, not yet sixteen. Less than a month later his brother Erasmus also died from consumption, the same disease that would eventually kill Novalis himself. Early death, loss and mourning were abundant influences on Novalis' worldvievy.

While it's clear that Novalis' love for Sophie was sincere, one can't help but wonder at the psychological underpinnings of his infatuation. As John Neubauer in his study of the poet remarks, examples of her letters suggest that Sophie was as unequal a partner intellectually as she was sexually; and Novalis' friend the theologian Friedrich Schliermacher commented that he did not believe Novalis chose "his beloved correctly, or rather, that he had even found her; I am almost convinced, she would not have sufficed him, had she stayed alive."' Novalis had already had at least one affair before meeting Sophie, and his university days carousing with Friedrich Schlegel more than likely included some sexual activity. But although he was sexual active, he also felt a need to repress his urges. Erotic fantasies and day dreams obsessed him, and he often sought the company of sexually unattainable women in order to mitigate these desires. The sexual act itself also repelled him; speaking with his brother about his first encounter with Sophie, he remarked that his "tender feelings" for her dissolved with the first "vulgar signs of favour." It may be reading too much into a perhaps harmless infatuation, but Sophie seems in many ways a figure of pure Sehnsucht: an ideal beauty, who remained, at least for the present, untouchable. Between pure sexual fantasy, and the reality of actual sex, she shimmered like a promising dawn. With Sophie's death, that unattainability became permanent; it was only then that Novalis allowed himself to recast her as a symbol of mystical union, an expression of the erotic spirituality common to the alchemical, hermetic and kabbalistic tradition in which Novalis found himself.

All of Novalis' work is saturated in the Pythagorean, hermetic themes of unity with the divine. Like Swedenborg, Blake and many others, Novalis saw the external, physical world as a symbol of a deeper, spiritual reality. With Sophie's death, Novalis saw in his chaste love for her a means of breaking through the outer shell and entering the radiant source. That transition, according to him, took place on 13 May 1797, when Novalis had a mystical experience, while contemplating Sophie's grave. There, as he recorded in his diary, "I was indescribably happy- moments of flashing enthusiasm - I blew the grave away like dust - her presence was palpable - I believed she would step forward at any minute."

In the two months prior to his experience, Novalis practised a form of `active imagination', engaging in various spiritual disciplines the aim of which was to prepare him for his breakthrough. These were, in part at least, strenuous attempts to curb his sexual fantasies while maintaining a strict focus on his love for the deceased teenager with whom he hoped to soon be rejoined in death. A diary of the time records a struggle between "sensuous imaginings" and his determination to maintain his "engagement in a higher sense." Novalis, like other, later dark romantics - Wagner and Mahler come to mind - sought in death a release from life's illusions; yet it was only in a higher, spiritual union, that his sexual hunger could be allowed free expression. One product of this tension are the' mystico-erotic Hymns to the Night (1800), one of the few of the poet's works published in his life time. In the third hymn we find a poeticized account of Novalis' grave experience.

In preparation for his mystical encounter, Novalis visited Sophie's grave frequently, poured over her letters and mementos, and read spiritual and mystical literature. How much his vision of Sophie was a product of his own powerful imagination is debatable, and the fact that sophia is Greek for wisdom, union with which is the central aim of mystical practice, cannot have escaped the attentive reader. That he practised conjuring her image up is clear from passages in his diary. A week before the vision, he recorded seeing her in profile, sitting beside him on his sofa, wearing a green scarf. One inspiration was a letter from his brother Carl, who spoke of a sudden yearning to die, brought on by a thunderstorm. He spoke of the "genuine sincerity" with which he contemplated being struck by lightning, the flash transporting one to "the eternal embrace of our beloved ones."

Death, for Novalis, meant transfiguration, an ecstatic escape from time and space, a notion shared by many Romantics, and captured in the canvases of the Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich. Whether this was so, or whether the grave meant sheer oblivion, Novalis did not have to wait long to find out. In 1798, Novalis met Julie von Charpentier, and his obsession with Sophie had apparently abated enough for him to become romantically involved with her. Their engagement, however, was doomed. Although his literary career was beginning to blossom (he had already met Goethe, and in Jena Novalis was the centre of a circle which included Ludwig Tieck, the Schlegel brothers, Friedrich Schelling and Friedrich Schliermacher) the tuberculosis that destroyed his brother was ravaging his own delicate frame. He continued to write and to fulfill his duties as an inspector of the Saxon salt mines but in October of 1800 his lungs suffered a major collapse. His health declined and on 25 March 1801 - four years and six days after Sophie's death - he and his beloved met in what we must assume was a more lasting union. At the age of 28, Novalis died.

E. T.A. Hoffmann

Perhaps the most romantic of the Romantics was a strangely self-divided individual whose wild dual personality and bouts of alcoholic excess were complemented by a meticulous concern for social duty and a work schedule that would daunt even the most disciplined character. Ernst Theodore Amadeus Hoffmann was by day a respected juror and civil servant, holding at different times in his life positions with the civil administration in Poland and the Prussian Supreme Court in Berlin. By night, however, he was something very different. A considerable graphic artist, Hoffmann was also a composer. Although most of his music is lost today, he is known to have written ten operas (one of which, Undine, is arguably the first Romantic work in that form) two symphonies, two masses, several cantatas, much incidental music and dozens of chamber works. He was also a capable conductor, know for his productions of Mozart and Gluck, as well as a brilliant music critic. Hoffmann's essays on Beethoven, at a time when the public had yet to acquire a taste for him, as well as on the idea of music as an autonomous spiritual world helped, more than anything else, to create the image of the composer as the hierophant of a higher, ideal realm. With Coleridge and Baudelaire, Hoffmann is one of those rare writers who turn criticism into an art. His essays and reviews arguing for an appreciation of music as a self-sufficient non-representational art form - for the superiority of instrumental against vocal music, a preference practically unheard of in his day - would influence important musical theorists like Schumann, Wagner and Schopenhauer, and would later feed the aesthetic doctrine of Symbolism, which would dominate the late 19th century. This is not surprising: music, and the `superior world' that it depicted, was the central experience of Hoffmann's life. In "Beethoven's Instrumental Music," Hoffmann expressed the reason for this in a succinct formula. "Music," he wrote, "reveals to man an unknown realm, a world quite separate from the outer sensual world surrounding him, a world in which he leaves behind all precise feelings in order to embrace an inexpressible longing."

Like Novalis, Hoffmann too knew Sehnsucht. Yet it was not only in his writings on music that Hoffmann spoke of another world. If it already seems that he was gifted enough for several people - and to some extent Hoffmann was several people - he was also the author of some of the most bizarre and beloved stories and novels of the 19th century. In many ways Hoffmann is like a cross between Edgar Allan Poe and Hans Christian Andersen, both of whom read his tales with profit. His stories have the glitter and dazzle of

fairy tales, yet are often shot through with a disturbing, macabre sensibility. Yet, like Goethe, he is one of those German authors that have never really got across to an English readership. Most people know Hoffmann today, if at all, in a form that would have pleased him: as the inspiration for Offenbach's light opera The Tales of Hoffmann, and for Tchaikovsky's ballet, The Nutcracker. Yet Hoffmann's weird tales of magical initiation, alchemy, strange states of consciousness and other occult themes display a psychological insight comparable to Baudelaire, Dostoyevsky, and Kafka.

Ernst Theodore Wilhelm Hoffmann was born in Konigs- berg in 1776; later he adopted the name Amadeus in honour of his beloved Mozart. He had an unhappy childhood, and the neglect he suffered at the hands of his parents was exacerbated by their early separation and divorce. Orphaned at an early age, he was brought up by strict relatives in a household made up of a grandmother, three aunts and a puritanical uncle. Perhaps the sudden loss of his parents and the absence of a personal golden age led to his love of music and its promise of an `ideal' realm. At any rate, his fascination with it began early, and an encounter with Mozart's Magic Flute set the stage for his later creations. Mozart's musical Masonic fairy tale of initiation and the eternal war between good and evil, symbolized by the magus Sarastro and the Queen of the Night, became the blueprint for Hoffmann's own tales. All of Hoffmann's stories engage this archetypal theme, which is the romantic conundrum par excellence: the clash between the dull world of routine necessity, and the pressing claims of the imagination. Hoffmann, who had a foot in both worlds, felt the stress and friction between them throughout his life, and it took its toll; he was known for his sudden shifts in temperament, plunging from childlike gaiety into dark introversion, from warm conviviality into silent isolation. He was a man of masks, of fragments and unsettling inconsistencies. It would be trendy to speak of him as postmodern, but it's obvious that the kind of all-embracing unity that a Goethe managed to effect was denied him.

Whether it was fate, his unconscious, immaturity, or Poe's `imp of the perverse', throughout his life, Hoffmann seemed to create a crisis whenever things ran too smoothly for him, and the claims of routine and normality threatened to submerge too deeply the longings for the other world. As Government Assessor in Posen, he jeopardized a comfortable position by drawing caricatures of local dignitaries; his excellent graphic work had him exiled to Plock, an unspeakably dull provincial town, where he had little to do but regret his rashness. Years later, in Berlin, the pattern was repeated when he satirized the Director of the Police Commission in his last novel, Master Flea. Hoffmann spoke of his intentions, and word of his acid wit got around; proceedings were begun against him. The book was eventually published with the offending parts excised.

In between these two incidents, which were simply the most prominent, Hoffmann carried on a dizzying career. His own life displays the same crowded backdrop and rapidity of change common to his stories, and throughout it Hoffmann showed a profound disregard for whatever physical effects this might entail. In a way it isn't surprising that he should die, paralyzed and in poverty, at the age of 46 - yet still dictating his last works - shattered by the accumulated buffetings of alcoholic excess, liver degeneration and a nervous disorder, locomotor ataxia.

Yet Hoffmann's life was an embodiment of his central themes: the uncertainty of identity and the conflict between the `two worlds'. Occult and paranormal ideas run throughout his stories. Mesmerism, hypnotism, somnambulism, multiple selves, the world of sylphs and salamanders, the perpetual battle between the dark and the light: these are the basic elements of his tales. But the recurring myth is the contrast and tension between the everyday world and that of magic. Nowhere did Hoffmann depict this with greater conviction that in The Golden Flower Pot (1814), which is generally considered his greatest work. Like Goethe and Novalis, Hoffmann used the Marchen, but with an important variation. Unlike Goethe and Novalis, Hoffmann sets his initiation story in the context of the everyday world, and brings magic down to earth. He is, as Jeremy Adler suggests, one of the first writers of the city, before Baudelaire and Poe."' Where Goethe's Fairy Tale has the odd, unfixed quality of a dream, Hoffmann's Dresden is immediately recognizable. His stories get their effect from the convincing depiction of the magical world invading the everyday. This is Hoffmann's `serapiontic principle', first proposed in his The Serapion Brotherhood (1819). The book is about a group of poets and artists who take their name from a mad nobleman who believes he is a monk

martyred during the reign of Emperor Decius. When his followers point out that the towers they see are of those of Bamberg, Serapion denies this, and says they are indeed those of Alexandria in the Second Century AD. When they point out that this is madness, he reminds them that they forget that the world they see is within their minds. Reality is within, not out there: the central Romantic theme. Yet, Hoffmann recognizes that this can lead to a dead end, both in life and in art. Novalis' hermetic Mdrehen depicts another reality, but one too detached from this one to be convincing. The `serapiontic principle' argues that in order for magic to be effective, it has to be made convincing, which means that it has to be rooted somehow in this world. "There is an inner world," Hoffmann wrote, "and a spiritual faculty for discerning it with absolute clearness - yes, with the most minute and brilliant distinctness. But it is part of our earthly lot that it is the outer world, in which we are entrapped, that triggers this spiritual faculty ... it is the outer world that causes the spirit to use its powers of perception." Hoffmann's stories are still so readable today because he rarely loses sight of this' intuition. And the aesthetic principle at work in his stories is also the psychological one at work in Hoffmann's life. It's reminiscent of the fairy tale of Goldilocks. Too much reality and life becomes dull, pointless and insipid; too much imagination, and we become Brother Serapion, living in a solipsistic dream world. But when the combination is "just right," - as it is so often in Hoffmann's stories - then we get `magic."' Not ethereal fairy worlds, or flat, dreary realism, but a sparkling, intoxicating tale that stimulates our imaginative and creative spirits - a kind of literary champagne, again appropriately enough, for Hoffmann. The only other writer to portray this dual reality with such clarity and force is David Lindsay, author of the gnostic classic A Voyage to Arcturus (1920); but Lindsay's vision is grim, often pessimistic, and he lacks Hoffmann's inviting good humour; we might say he is Beethoven to Hoffmann's Mozart.

In his life Hoffmann never realized the "just right", the fruitful combination of the two worlds, that he achieved in his stories. Yet, for the Romantics, life and art are two sides of the same adventure, and what makes The Golden Flower Pot an inexhaustible source (a "pot of gold") is that by reading it, we are drawn into the very myth it presents. Hoffmann is the first writer with whom the equation Poetry=Magic is made clear; the reader, by association, is made accomplice to the alchemical transformation. The props of Hoffmann's initiatory tale come for the most part from Le Comte de Gabalais (1670), an occult novel in the Renaissance Rosicrucian manner, depicting the elemental world of Paracelsus, by the Abbe Mont- faucon de Villars. The student Anselmus, a clumsy, dreamy young man with a taste for poetry, is troubled by a recurring vision of a glittering green snake." The snake, it turns out, is Serpentina, the daughter of the Archivist Lindhorst, who is in reality an elemental salamander, exiled to earth for a transgression committed millennia ago. Anselmus, who is also attracted to the beautiful but worldly Veronica (who wants him to become Hofrath and lead a sensible, respectable life), is hired by Lindhorst to copy out a magical manuscript, which indeed relates the story of his primeval fall from grace, and of his perpetual battle against the forces of darkness, symbolized in the story by the evil apple woman ... The story's tension lies in Anselmus having to choose between the two worlds, and much of it is influenced by Hoffmann's reading of G.H. Schubert's Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft (Views from the Nightside of Natural Science) (1808), at the time an immensely popular work of Naturphilosophie, which dealt with the irrational and what we might call paranormal side of existence. In the end, after a series of trials and fantastic adventures, Anselmus, like Hoffmann, plumps for Serpentina, and with her and the Magus Lindhorst, they retire to their "freehold in Atlantis," Schubert's symbol for mankind's original state of unity with nature. Yet the reader, who we must assume has at least the potential for poetry, or magic, is also a participant in the dialectic, and having read Hoffmann's account, must decide whether it is merely a diverting story, or a metaphor for his existence ... Relating an account of his magical past, the archivist is accused by the philistines of oriental bombast, and is requested to tell them something that is true. Lindhorst replies that he knows no story more true than the one he is telling them. 1, for one, agree: under the deceptive surface of an entertaining fable, Hoffmann has managed to articulate the central myth of human life.

Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), like Hoffmann, is another serious writer who has become, for the general reading public, merely a teller of gruesome horror stories. For myself as an adolescent in the 1960s, these

were made into cinematic and highly enjoyable pulp by the filmmaker Roger Corman. "The Raven" is one of those poems you learn - or used to learn, at any rate - early on in English lessons in the US, and "The Tell-Tale Heart" has to be one of the most anthologized stories ever, turning up in scores of `Tales of Terror' type collections. But there is of course another side to Poe, a side that fellow poets like Charles Baudelaire, J.K. Huysmans and Stephan Mallarme knew and appreciated, unlike the Americans of Poe's own time, or the later serious critics, like Henry James and T.S. Eliot, who saw in his work nothing but an unfortunate influence on juvenile minds.

Poe's own life is a horror story more unsettling than any he wrote. Although it's accepted that accounts of his depravity and drug addiction are exaggerated, it is true that his life, beginning with a runaway father and the loss of his mother at the age of two, was a series of painful mistakes, defeats and frustrations. In true Romantic fashion, Poe died under mysterious circumstances, at the age of 40.13 Like Novalis' Sophie, Poe's own child-bride, Virginia, died of consumption, her demise being the ostensible cause of Poe's last decline and supposed final, destructive binge. For most of his life, Poe lived in abject poverty, and even with literary triumphs and fame - "The Raven" was the one clear success in his lifetime - he barely earned enough from his work as critic and editor to keep body and soul together. In Poe's case, this may not have been that problematic, as the separation of soul from the confines-of the body was his central metaphysical concern.

Like Hoffmann, Poe was a divided man, a self-professed rationalist (inventor of the tale of detection) who was obsessed with notions of the soul and the world beyond, an idealist poet who was chin deep in the cut-throat world of antebellum American journalism. Also like Hoffmann Poe was fascinated by the human mind and explored its lesser travelled environs, experimenting with hypnagogia, somnambulism, dreams and mesmerism. Poe's internal division even went so far as to form for him the blueprint of the psyche: he accepted the tenets of `Facultative Psychology', which argued that different mental faculties, like rationality, the `Moral Sense' and the `Aesthetic Sense', exist in isolation from each other. Again like Hoffmann, Poe tried to unify his many and disparate selves through the magic wand of Art. Any reader of Poe's critical works soon becomes acquainted with a dictum that runs through them like an idee fixe: unity of effect. That a man whose inner world harboured a mob of selves would be enamoured of unity is understandable. But Poe's vision of a unified world went beyond the printed page; or rather, although the paraphernalia of his poems and stories include reanimated corpses, premature burial, doppelganger, and fiendishly beating hearts, their subject is the knowledge of the true world, lying beyond the veil of the senses, that "wild, weird clime that lieth sublime/Out of SPACE, out of TIME." As one critic writes, "The direction of Poe's mind, the thrust of his imagination is ... away from the body toward the spirit, away from the `dull realities' of this world, toward the transcendent consciousness on a `far happier star'."14

That Poe is, like Novalis, essentially concerned with the 'journey into the interior' may come as a surprise to readers who remember him for conte cruels like "The Pit and the Pendulum," or for psychological thrillers like "The Black Cat." But Poe's stories and fables can be seen as inward voyages to a visionary consciousness. In his Marginalia, Poe wrote of his experiences of hypnagogia, that half-dream state that exists between waking and sleeping. These visions, he writes "arise in the soul ... only at its epochs of most intense tranquillity ... at those mere points of time where the confines of the waking world blend with those of the world of dreams. I am aware of these `fancies' only when I am on the brink of sleep, with the consciousness that I am so ... (they) have in them a pleasurable ecstasy, as far beyond the most pleasurable of the world of wakefulness, or of dreams, as the Heaven of the Northman theology is beyond its Hell. I regard the visions, even as they arise, with an awe which, in some measure, moderates or tranquillizes the ecstasy - I so regard them, through a conviction (which seems a portion of the ecstasy itself) that this ecstasy, in itself, is of a character supernal to the Human Nature - is a glimpse of the spirit's outer world ..."15

Hidden knowledge, strange journeys, and weird, uncommon landscapes often form the content of hypnagogic hallucinations, and also of Poe's stories. "The Purloined Letter," "The Balloon Hoax," and "The Domain of Arnheim"; those unusual interior spaces, like the House of Usher or Auguste Dupin's study: all symbolize, perhaps, the dark recesses of the mind, or idealized retreats in which to dream and meditate.

And while clinical psychologists and neuroscientists may see hypnagogic visions as the flotsam and jetsam of an idling brain, for poets like Poe and visionary occultists like Swedenborg they are the signposts pointing to an undiscovered country of the soul. No doubt, the voyage outward may be risky. Poe knew this, as do the narrators of "MS. Found in a Bottle," "A Descent into the Maelstrom" and The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym. But he also knew it was the only trip worth taking.

Poe was a student of occult literature, and hermetic and alchemical themes appear throughout his work, in symbolic fashion in tales like "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Assignation" and "Ligiea," as well as in more straightforward satires like "Von Kempelen and his Discovery."'6 But in his three `mesmerism tales', "A Tale of The Ragged Mountains" (1844), "Mesmeric Revelations" (1844), and "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" (1845), his belief in the possibility of piercing the veil between the `two worlds' is presented in almost straightforward reportage. Poe was a perpetrator of literary hoaxes; and as one critic points out, at the time, a fad for pseudo-science had hit the States." "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" caused a stir in England as well as America, prompting practising mesmerists and poets like Elizabeth Barrett Browning to write to Poe, asking if the account was true. But if Poe's account of a mesmerist keeping his deceased subject in a state of suspend animation for seven months, at the end of which his body dissolves into "a nearly liquid mass of loathsome - of detestable putridity" carries more macabre effect, "Mesmeric Revelation," is closer to Poe's metaphysical target, and is a sort of dry run for the full blown apocalypse in his magnificently bombastic and eerily prescient prose poem Eureka (1848), written shortly before his death.

Poe got most of his information about mesmerism from the Reverend Chauncy Hare Townshend's Facts in Mesmerism (1840). It is clear why Townshend's book impressed him. The rationalist Poe had little interest in spiritual interpretations of Mesmer's ideas; he was looking for facts, as both the opening sentence of this story, and the title of the Valdemar account attest. Writing to the poet James Russell Lowell, Poe remarked "I have no belief in spirituality. I think the word a mere word. No one has a conception of spirit. We cannot imagine what is not." What we can imagine, or at least what Poe could and does in "Mesmeric Revelation", is an infinitely refined matter that is `unparticled', not distinguishable by minute parts (atoms) but unified. This unparticled matter permeates the universe and is, for Poe, and for the mesmerized hero of his tale, God.18 This unparticled matter is hidden to our usual senses, but can be glimpsed in half-dream states and in mesmeric trance. Strangely, the notion of a kind of matter unperceivable by our normal senses, and within which other kinds of beings exist, will resurface in the work of Lord Lytton, Eliphas Levi and Guy de Maupassant. Poe's report from beyond was so convincing that a Swedenborgian group wrote to him, informing him that they could corroborate his findings. Poe somewhat peevishly informed them that, "The story is pure fiction from beginning to end." Yet he was at pains to argue that the vision of his longer work Eureka, basically an elaboration of what we find here, was true. Poe's selfdivision ran deep, yet even if we are left unimpressed by his account of an unparticled omnipresent divine substance, the remarkable prescience exhibited in Eureka is enough to suggest that hypnagogic states and mesmeric trances can afford insight into some unusual aspects of reality. Poe expected much of Eureka, believing it would establish him as an important metaphysical thinker. The book was a flop, yet within its florid pages, Poe predicts black holes, the expanding universe, curved space, galactic clusters, the discovery of a new asteroid orbiting between Mars and Jupiter, as well as other cosmological notions like the anthropic principle, unthought of at the time of writing. Critics had no idea what to make of it, and given Poe's reputation as a drunkard and drug-taker, it isn't surprising that they relegated his metaphysical flights to the same category as pink elephants. Their ignorance shattered Poe. To his publisher George Putnam Poe announced "I have solved the secret of the universe!", and demanded a first edition of 50,000 copies. Putnam squeezed out an advance of $14, and the 500 copies he printed didn't sell.

Most readers may find Poe's vision too abstract to offer much existential comfort, yet embedded in his unparticled matter is a Christian moral. When asked "to what good end is pain," Poe's mesmerized savant replies, "The pain of the primitive life of Earth, is the sole basis of the bliss of the ultimate life in Heaven." Like others we will encounter, Eliphas Levi, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Malcolm Lowry, Poe's way was the way of suffering. We hardly need to be mesmerized to imagine that he would try to find some meaning in it.

Balzac

A story about Balzac tells how, before locking himself in his study, he would undress and hand his clothes to his servant, with the command that he was not to return them until he had written his quota for the day. Apocryphal, no doubt, but rooted in truth. Balzac did don a monkish robe before setting down to a day's, or rather a night's work - his usual schedule was to rise at midnight and work until eight. And he did produce an enormous amount of words each night: one estimate places an average output at around sixteen printed pages. Balzac's production was the literary equivalent of the `progress' that was changing the landscape of France in the first half of the 19th century. Not counting the pseudonymous works of his early years, between the age of 30 and his death in 1850 at the age of 51, Balzac produced over a hundred novels and short stories, not to mention his non-fiction works. He was slowed down only in his last years by his final illness, which was clearly brought on by his crushing schedule. The Industrial Revolution had ushered in a new age of factories, mass production and assembly lines, and Balzac's incredible flood of language rivalled the most prodigious of these new "satanic mills." He was, as he called himself, a "mind factory," and his fluency has led some critics to see in him little more than an egotistic hack with an insatiable need to see his name in print. Such aspersions, however, are wasted on Balzac. He was Olympian enough to be all these things, and still be one of the 19th century's giants of literature.

Coleridge and De Quincey had their opium, Baudelaire his wine and hashish, Poe his drink. Balzac had thick strong black coffee: one estimate puts his working intake at around fifty thousand cups. Made by his own hand, this powerful brew fuelled the writing of his Gargantuan La Comedie Humaine and eventually weakened his heart enough to kill him. Balzac's aim in this mountainous chain of novels, unfinished at the time of his death, was to portray "the history of the human heart traced thread by thread." His vision was of a vast prose epic depicting the realities of the modern urban world burgeoning around him. Master criminals, financiers, socialites, prostitutes and the new urban poor: their story would be told against the remorseless backdrop of their heartless-mistress, Paris. It is a bit odd then to realize that this Titan of realism, whom Zola would later champion as a precursor to his own sociological novels, was an unrepentant life-long mystic to whom the outer, visible world was only a symbol of an inner, spiritual realm.

Honore Balzac - he later adopted the aristocratic `de' when he published his first novel under his own name - was born in Tours in 1799. Like Poe and Hoffmann, Balzac had a dual temperament, clearly fashioned from what he inherited from his parents. Balzac's father was a child of the Enlightenment and the Revolution, an agnostic rationalist with a keen nose for business and finance. Balzac's mother, whose indifference and cold-heartedness to the boy is legendary, was a reader of Swedenborg and Saint-Martin, and a follower of Mesmer, all three of whom would become central influences on the fledgling novelist. It isn't surprising that in Seraphita Balzac would focus on the archetypal symbol for the union of opposites, the androgyne. The alchemical fusion embodied in that sublime creature Seraphita/Seraphitus, spoke also of Balzac's need to bring together, and hence pass beyond, the opposites in his nature.

Balzac's belief in the occult is well documented. "All his life," his biographer Stefan Zweig wrote, "Balzac clung to the most primitive forms of superstition. He believed in amulets, always wore a lucky ring with mysterious oriental symbols and before taking any important decisions he would consult a fortune teller like any Parisian seamstress."" During a trip to Vienna Balzac met the Orientalist Baron Joseph de Hammer-Purgstall, whose book on the Hashishin started a vogue for eastern mystical conspiracy theories. The baron gave Balzac a magical talisman, a ring engraved with strange Arabic characters. Balzac called the talisman `Bedouck' and carried it everywhere, believing it would bring good luck, invisibility, long life, and success with women. Other stories attest to what most biographers consider Balzac's credulity.

But Balzac's deep belief in occult phenomena went far beyond these superficial signs. He was, along with Poe and Hoffmann, a profound student of Mesmer, and of the novels making up his Comedie Humaine, at least four - Louis Lambert (1832), Seraphita (1835), Ursule Mirouet (1842), and Cousin Pons (1847) - deal directly with mesmeric and theosophical ideas. Like Poe, Balzac was convinced that in the `mesmeric trance', consciousness was put into "a state in which the inner sense made contact with the spiritual world,

freeing the inner man to wander through space and time ..."20 Balzac had flights of metaphysics equal to Poe's, but his central obsession with `magnetism' was its manifestation in the human will. Will power for Balzac was a very definite thing, an actual force emanating from the personality, generally through the eyes. The stuff of pulp thrillers, immortalized in De Maurier's Svengali, for Balzac and other writers, like his friend Theophile Gautier, it was a fact, and Balzac himself was living proof. Gautier, who used magnetic tropes in many of his stories, spoke of Balzac's "lightning-like glances, so brilliant, so charged with magnetism," and remonstrated with him for using his powers to seduce women. It isn't surprising that Balzac should be interested in will power, given his own remarkable fund of it. He believed that at birth each of us is given a fixed amount of this magnetism, and that with its use, it is burned up, never to be restored. In many ways his novels are thought experiments in which he explores the different ways in which his characters expend their vital fluid. Balzac was always impressed by sheer, ruthless will. Perhaps the archetypal expression of this is the ambitious Rastignac looking at Paris from his garret window and saying, "It's between you and me now!"

But Balzac was also interested in other, more subtle powers of the will. In Louis Lambert, his idealized self portrait, he depicts a young man with almost hallucinatory powers of imagination. When Louis first discovers the world of literature, it is as if he has discovered himself for the first time. Reading becomes "a species of hunger which nothing could allay." "Whenever I wish it," he tells the narrator - Balzac himself- "I can draw a veil over my eyes. Then I suddenly see within me a camera obscura, where natural objects are reproduced in purer forms than those under which they first appeared to my external sense." "When I read the story of the battle of Austerlitz ... I saw every incident. The roar of the cannon, the cries of the fighting men rang in my ears and made my inmost self quiver ..

Clearly Louis has discovered Hoffmann's other world, the imagination. Yet a streak of romantic pessimism makes Balzac kill off Louis, a victim of the very magnetic powers that carry him to the beyond. Balzac believed that a too energetic use of the vital fluids leads to death, and again, his own volcanic history seems to corroborate this. This is the direction Romantic occultism will take as the century progresses. Unlike Blake and Goethe, from Novalis on, the idea that the external world can be transformed into the other world through the imagination, is dropped, and in its place we get the belief that this world is a trap, or at least that it is a sphere too crude and imperfect for sensitive souls like Romantic poets. The option then is to escape this world, and the best way of doing this is, of course, through death.

In Seraphita Balzac brings together several different occult themes: the androgyne, the other world, mesmerism and Swedenborgianism. Balzac's Swedenborg, however, is a particular variant, and is characteristic of the occult smorgasbord that made up alternative thought in 1830s Paris. Of mesmerism Gautier said that it supplied himself and other writers with a system of "the fantastic, the mysterious, the occult and the inexplicable." The same can be said of Swedenborg's doctrines. Balzac knew of them only through a French digest of the mage's work; most of his other knowledge came secondhand through his mother. Another influence was the interesting figure of David Ferdinand Koreff, a German physician who had once held a chair in animal magnetism at the University of Berlin, and who had now moved to Paris. Koreff was a confirmed mesmerist, and introduced the cream of the Parisian literary world to Mesmer's ideas. A witty, cosmopolitan character, Koreff knew Hoffmann, who he apparently resembled, and, as Hoffmann's work was then enjoying great Parisian acclaim, this cachet made him a desirable guest with the literary set. Among his friends and clients were Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Musset, Prosper Merimee, Chateaubriand, Stendhal, Benjamin Constant, Heinrich Heine and Balzac.

Balzac was a voracious reader with an insatiable hunger for knowledge and ideas. He was not, however, a particularly analytical or systematic thinker, and the mesmerism that came to him had already passed through a gauntlet of other occult ideas, all of which he absorbed into his capacious mind. Mesmer and Swedenborg met in their belief that in its attempt to account for the external world, rationalist science ignored the deeper questions of man's inner being. That inner being's transfiguration is the theme of Seraphita. The ostensible inspiration for the book was a sculpture by a minor 19th century artist, Theophile Bra, a work depicting Mary holding the infant Christ, surrounded by angels. Angels hold an important place in Swedenborg's philosophy - they are, in fact, humans who have passed over the threshold - and Balzac

had had the idea of writing a novel about one for some time. Bra shared with Balzac a deep interest in esoteric thought, and his statue seemed to have a profound effect on him. Balzac's angel became the hermaphroditic creature, Seraphita/ Seraphitus, with whom two mere humans are in love: to the woman he appears as a man, to the man, she is seen as a woman.

Seraphita/Seraphitus is the child of a devout Swedenborgian couple who, during the nine months of pregnancy, performed daily prayers and spiritual meditations. The result was a kind of Rosemary's Baby in reverse. The couple's spiritual preparations were so intense that on the day of the child's birth, Swedenborg, ten years dead, appeared before them and congratulated them on their work.

Balzac wasn't the only one fascinated by hermaphrodites. Around the same time Gautier had published his Mademoiselle de Maupin, a light, frivolously shocking treatment of the theme, remembered now mostly for its influential "art for art's sake" preface. For all his interest in mesmerism, Gautier was very much a man of this world, and he really shared very little of Balzac's passion for the beyond. Yet both may have seen that, along with the long esoteric tradition of androgyne in alchemy and Kabbalah, the idea is also a metaphor for the artist's soul. Balzac himself said that the artist is something of a man/woman. Seraphita, though not his best work, does do something to bear this reflection out.

Gerard de Nerval

If Gerard de Nerval is known at all to English readers, it's more for his Bohemian eccentricities than for his work as a writer. He is, for instance, the man who walked a lobster on a blue ribbon along the Palais-Royal in Paris, and when questioned why, replied: "It does not bark and it knows the secrets of the deep". Others may recall that he once sported a human skull as a wine goblet, claiming that it had been his mother's, and that he had to kill her to get it. (She in fact had died when he was two and he never knew her.) Or there was the wigwam he invariably brought when staying at a friend's, a cumbersome article that was nevertheless more mobile than the immense Renaissance bed he bought for the imaginary consummation of an impossible love affair. (Unused, the bed was finally palmed off on his great friend, Theophile Gautier.) Nerval was also known for carrying an apron string around with him that at different times he variously explained as being the Queen of Sheba's garter, part of Madame de Maintenon's corset, or an indefinite accessory of Marguerite de Valois. For years, friends like Gautier, Baudelaire and others looked at the antics of le bon Gerard with amusement, seeing in them little more than the jeux d'sprit of their talented, if distracted, friend. But soon the eccentricities passed into more perplexing behaviour, and it became clear that something was wrong. Gerard had cleared the threshold of a peculiar kind of madness and was, it seemed, unable to return. In the end, homeless, destitute and quite insane, on a frigid January night in 1855 he put his prestigious apron string to more definite use by hanging himself with it in the filthy rue de la Vieille-Lanterne, a squalid alley near the rue de Rivoli. He was forty-six and had only recently been released from his second extended stay in a mental asylum.

Of the French Romantics, Nerval was the one most susceptible to the influence of Hoffmann and the German Romantics; he was also an encyclopedic student of the occult. A visionary like Blake, Nerval, like the student Anselmus, was aware of the other world, and pursued it as his great dream throughout his life. In the end, however, the tables were turned and the dream - now often a nightmare - pursued him. There is a grim irony to be found in the fact that Nerval took the name Aurelia, the title of his most famous work, from a story in Hoffmann's The Serapion Brotherhood. When the black night of madness descended over him - which Aurelia (1855), his masterpiece, recounts in unsettling detail - Nerval, like Brother Serapion, found himself in a world no longer bordering on the territory of reality.

Gerard de Nerval was born Gerard Labrunie in Paris on 22 May 1808. His father, a stern, taciturn individual, was a surgeon-major in Napoleon's Grand Armee; soon after his birth, his mother, Marie-Antoinette-Marguerite Laurent, leaving Gerard in the care of a nurse, followed her husband on a Russian campaign, and died at the age of twenty-five from a fever contracted while crossing a bridge littered with corpses. She was buried in Silesia. Gothic ghosts and Hoffmahnesque settings were not the only spirits drawing Gerard

to the misty Teutonic forests. His mother's dreamlike memory - the dream of a memory, in fact - also gave him the material with which to reinvent himself. After years of signing himself simply `Gerard', he adopted a new identity that was a near mirror image of his mother's maiden name. "de Nerval" was the esoteric nexus of a host of imagined histories, the focal point of what Nerval called his genealogie fantastique. Along with showing his clear descent from the Roman Emperor Nerva, his new nome de plume, he claimed, undoubtedly linked him with the German king Otho and the Napoleonic line ... Less doubtful, it was also a secret code for a patch of land in his beloved Valois, owned by his mother's family, the `clos de Nerval', or `black vale'. Yet Richard Sieburth, in his masterful introduction to a recent collection of Nerval's writings, suggests other, more initiatory meanings at work in Gerard's new self: "Nerval" speaks both of Avernus, the mythological portal to the underworld, and vernal, the promise of rebirth21. That Nerval made the descent is unquestioned - his genealogie fan- tastique dates from his first mental breakdown in 1841. His subsequent return trip, however, was less secure: from his mother he also inherited a peculiarly personal form of Sehnsucht: a perpetually unfulfilled search for the Feminine Ideal, an anima image he would house in unlikely candidates with generally disastrous consequences.

A precocious child, rejecting his father's wish that he follow in his footsteps, while still a teenager Gerard published several slim volumes of verse. He had already met Gautier, a friendship that would last his lifetime, and by nineteen had made a name for himself with a translation of Goethe's Faust, of which the Olympian himself spoke highly. In 1830 Nerval took part with Gautier and other young Romantics in the theatre riots surrounding Victor Hugo's Hernani, and soon after plunged headfirst into Bohemian22 life. His cronies at this time included Petrus Borel, the self-styled lycanthrope; Charles Nodier, supposed initiate into secret societies; Theophile Dondey, who wore glasses when he went to bed so he could see his dreams; and Alphonse Esquiros, author of the occult novel The Magician and later friend of the kabbalist Eliphas Levi. An inheritance from his grandfather of some 30,000 francs allowed Gerard to travel to the south of France and Italy; it also gave him the wherewithal to found a magazine, Le Monde dramatique. This folded within a year, and Nerval's small fortune was dissipated in promoting the career of his ill-chosen ewig weibliche, Jenny Colon,'described by one critic as "a plump, blonde, second rate actress of easy virtue . . . "23 It is doubtful whether Nerval ever possessed jenny; like Novalis, with whose work he was well acquainted, Nerval's women served more as imaginative stimulators than sensual gratifiers and when it was clear he could do no more for her, she dropped him.

Now heavily in debt, Nerval entered into a spiral of overwork and nervous exhaustion that would continue until his death. He made several attempts to become solvent, becoming in quick succession a dramatist, man Friday and collaborator with Alexandre Dumas, journalist, diplomat, critic and man of letters. Nothing came of this, and Nerval's fortunes were so low that, after his diplomatic mission to Vienna, he had to make part of his way back to Paris on foot. Signs that something drastic was on its way appeared: his dispatches back to Paris showed evidence of delusions of grandeur, of a personality cracking under the strain. In Vienna he played the role of the literary wit, moving in a milieu of eroticism, conspiracy and mesmeric party games, but fissures were opening in his sensitive, gentle soul, and portions of the other world welled up into his waking life.

A series of violent episodes during the mardi gras season ended in his arrest and hospitalization. For nine months he was a patient at the Monmartre sanatorium of Dr. Esprit Blanche. A sense of his condition can be had from a letter he wrote at the time:

You see spirits who talk to you in broad daylight, at night you see perfectly shaped, perfectly distinct phantoms, you think you remember having lived in other forms, you imagine you are growing very tall and that your head is touching the stars, the horizon of Saturn or Jupiter spreads before your eyes ...2a

Depending on your view of things, this is either sheer schizophrenia or a too intense glimpse of that other world that visionaries like Swedenborg and Blake frequently visited. In his account of his own `descent into the unconscious', C.G. Jung remarked that others had been shaken by these storms, Nietzsche and the poet Holderlin with whom Nerval felt a deep kinship. They had been broken by these eruptions (both went mad) but Jung, whose account reads like a classic depiction of psychosis, believed he withstood them because, along with his own brute strength, he had a raft of solid, middle class responsibilities to support

him: his family, his profession, his obligations to his patients .2' Nerval, like Nietzsche and Holderlin, was a drifter in life; Gautier, perhaps his closest friend, described Nerval as an "apodal swallow ... all wings and no feet." It is easy to see how such a creature would be prey to strong winds. Yet it is too easy to relegate Nerval's visions to the dustbin of insanity. Years later, another visionary poet, Rene Daumal, wrote an essay in which he argued that he, too, had visited the exact same dreamscape that Nerval depicts in his poignant Aure'lia. "So, I was not alone!" Daumal, another precocious poet, exclaims, at the beginning of "Nerval the Nyctalope. ,21 Jung's collective unconscious, the weird terrain of alchemical allegory, and the clinically observed phenomenon of shared dreams gives support to Aldous Huxley's much quoted remark that the mind has its own "antipodes, its Africas and Borneos." Nerval may have been merely a dreamer thrust too roughly into the geography of his own soul.

One mystic landscape he certainly did share with others was the orient. A few months after his release, Nerval embarked on a journey to the east. From Marseilles Nerval headed into the mythic realms of Cairo, Alexandria, Acre, Beirut, Syria, Smyrna and Constantinople, with many other stops along the way. Part rest cure, part `esotourist' expedition, Nerval's year long wanderings were as much a descent into his own occult heritage as they were a de rigueur Grand Tour for self-respecting Western Orientalists. The Arabian Nights, Vathek and The Saragossa Manuscript had created an appetite for accounts of exotic travel and strange customs. Hugo, Gautier, Chateaubriand and Lamartine had all contributed to the fad; now Gerard was heading back to the source. Indeed, in the first wave of his madness, after a night in which he expounded ecstatically on a number of occult topics, Nerval refused to be accompanied home by a friend, and explained that he was not heading back to his room. "Where are you going then?" the friend asked. "To the East," was Gerard's wild reply.

Inspired by Faust, the teenage Nerval had plunged into hermetic literature. Another guide was the ex-rabbi Alexander Weill, who Nerval had met in Frankfurt while researching the play Leo Burckhart, which he co-wrote with Dumas. Weill was a kabbalist and student of the hermetic mysteries, and it is believed that he introduced Nerval to the serious study of the hidden tradition. Mystical and occult themes saturate Nerval's work27. The early play The Alchemist was based on the life of the Renaissance esotericist Nicolas Flamel; years later he would write Les Illumines, its title taken from Adam Weishaupt's secret society. Nerval shared Abbe Barruel's belief that the Illuminati were the hidden hand behind the Revolution, and in Les Illumines he brings together a grab bag of articles dealing with characters like Jacques Cazotte, Cagliostro, the strange Raoul Spifame, Restif de la Bretonne and others, all against a backdrop of Enlightenment occultism. His often impenetrable series of poems, Les Chimeres, are rich in dark references to Pythagoras, Egyptian and Greek mythology, and Christian mysticism. But it is in Voyage in the Orient that Nerval gave a free hand to both his occult preoccupations and his need to fictionalize himself. Whether Voyage in the Orient is "an odyssey - that of Nerval's souli2" or "a tissue of fabrications" and a "Borgesian voyage through the library,"29 it, as its translator remarks, undoubtedly represents "the synthesis of Nerval's esoteric thought," and places him "somewhere between William Blake and Madame Blavatsky.i31

Voyage in the Orient is full of exotic impedimenta: hashish, eroticism, strange dream states and astral doubles, secret societies and mystic religions, subterranean kingdoms, elementals, Zoroastrianism, the Druse, and the mythology of the `preAdamite races'. Among other works, it draws heavily on Silvestre de Sacy's Memoire sur la dynastie des assassins et sur 1'origine de leur nom (1809). Using the frame of The Arabian Nights, Nerval inserts novella length tales into his reportage and travel writing. "Makbenash" is a retelling of the central Masonic myth, the murder of Hiram Abif. It's unclear what level of freemasonry Nerval achieved; although it is clear he was well versed in Masonic lore, his actual status in the craft is vague. The chapter is the finale to "The Tale of the Queen of the Morning and Soliman the Prince of the Genii," which Nerval claims he heard being told by a professional storyteller over a two week period in a cafe behind the Beyazid mosque in Istanbul, a trope that, true or not, hearkens back to Jan Potocki's own account of his search for the original manuscript of The Arabian Nights. In Adoniram, Nerval's name for Hiram Abif, we find his idealized self-image, the creatorprophet, murdered by the philistines. The Queen of the Morning is, of course, Sheba, with whom, we know, Nerval had a peculiarly unique relationship.

Although he is remembered today for the unforgettable opening line "It was a dark and stormy night," (Paul Clifford (1830)), in his day, Bulwer - later Lord Lytton (1803-1873) - was an immensely popular novelist, writing a series of very successful `silver fork' romances, which combined gothic melodrama with fashionable settings.31 Perhaps his best known work is his historical novel, The Last Days of Pompei (1834). But along with being a bestselling novelist, BulwerLytton may also have been the single most important occultist of the 19th century; in several highly entertaining works he introduced a variety of esoteric and magical themes which were to prove immensely influential. His The Haunter and the Haunted (1859) - also know as The House and the Brain - is one of the best Victorian ghost stories, appearing beside Poe and M.R. James in classic anthologies. Strikingly modern in its scientific investigation of the ghost - Lytton was one of the first psychic investigators, predating the Society for Psychical Research by decades- it remains a powerfully evocative tale, disturbingly eerie in atmosphere, and containing a description of a magician that ranks besides Tolkien's Gandalf. A Strange Story (1861), an oddly neglected work, centres on reincarnation and the alchemical quest for the elixir of life. Two other novels, however, draw heavily on Bulwer-Lytton's interest in Rosicrucianism, esoteric knowledge, and the idea of a superior type: his Rosicrucian work Zanoni (1842), and the occult science-fiction tale The Coming Race (1871). Both would become central texts of the modern occult revival.

Bulwer-Lytton was one of those embarrassingly versatile Victorians, combining a successful career as a politician, with a prodigious literary output, and a social life that would make tabloid front pages today: an original dandy, among other accomplishments he is responsible for the rule of black evening dress for men. Bulwer-Lytton's literary life began with the Byronesque Ismael: An Oriental Tale (1820), which set him squarely among the fashionably dark and brooding. A later novel, Pelham (1828), proved successful, yet a disastrous marriage, a scandalous affair and Lytton's extravagant lifestyle, soon put him beyond the pale. Penniless and ostracized - his aristocratic mother cut off her support because of his outrageous behaviour - Lytton discovered a sympathy with the social outcast and outsider; this inspired his successful `Newgate novels', a series of narratives romanticizing criminals. This feeling for the outsider would also have occult repercussions. In the outcast of society, Bulwer-Lytton's evolutionary intuition saw possibilities not available to the law-abiding citizen. Such characters, he recognized, may have more potential for spiritual growth and experience than the average citizen, safe within the bounds of mediocrity and routine. This was, of course, a theme that would strike home later in the century. Decades before Nietzsche first presented the idea, Bulwer-Lytton was suggesting that the higher type, when it arrives, might very well find itself "beyond good and evil." In The Coming Race, which introduced the mystic force vril, by now a staple of the `occult Nazis' sub-genre32, Lytton presented his readers with an entire civilization of such supermen. With his first meeting with one of these beings, Bulwer-Lytton's hero remarks that "I felt that this man-like image was endowed with forces inimical to man." The Vril-ya are ". . . a race akin to man's, but infinitely stronger of form and grander of aspect, and, inspiring the unutterable feeling of dread. ,33 The Vril-ya live for hundreds of years, and it is possible that Bernard Shaw may have had BulwerLytton's `coming race' in mind when he wrote of his `Ancients' in his creative evolutionist play Back to Methuselah (1924). Certainly one of Bulwer-Lytton's readers who harboured similar suspicions about human evolution would prove immensely influential in the history of occultism: Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.

Lytton's interest in the occult started early. At eight, the young Edward found himself "ankle-deep in the great slough of Metaphysics," when he was introduced to his grandfather's library. An early acquaintance was the Rev. Chauncey Hare Townshend, whose Facts in Mesmerism proved a central influence on Poe. In his early twenties, while on a visit to Paris, Lytton went through a kind of psychic crisis. Retreating from society life, he headed to Versailles for some months, where he spent hours walking or riding alone. In a letter to a friend he explained that "I know by experience that those wizard old books are full of holes and pitfalls. I myself fell into one and remained there forty-five days and three hours without food, crying for help as loud as I could, but nobody came." This unsettling experience - repeated at different times throughout his career - would later emerge in Bulwer-Lytton's work as the episode of "The Dweller of the Threshold," from Zanoni. It is an encounter with one's "shadow," with all that is corrupt and evil, the dark side of the soul, a necessary

trial before advancing to the higher stages of initiation. Among the later esoteric thinkers to adopt this theme was Rudolf Steiner, who incorporates it into the scheme of spiritual evolution presented in his book Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment (1909).

Lytton's disturbing rite of passage did not prevent him from becoming an esoteric mover and shaker among the spiritually curious Victorians. As Joscelyn Godwin makes clear in his exhaustive study, The Theosophical Enlightenment, Lytton was at the centre of several occult circles, "the pivotal figure of nineteenth century occultism."" Among other notables, Lytton entertained the renowned spiritualist Daniel Dunglas Home, who held seances at Knebworth, Lytton's estate. (Robert Browning, less open-minded, vilified Home as the despicable "Mr. Sludge, Medium.") At Gore House, the Kensington home of Lady Marguerite Gardiner, the Countess of Blessington (Albert Hall stands there today), Lytton rubbed esoteric elbows with Benjamin Disraeli, Philip Henry, the Fourth Earl of Stanhope (friend of Richard Cosway), John Varley and other luminaries. Among an evening's entertainments were Lytton's and Disraeli's psychic experiments, and Varley's accounts of the mad poet, William Blake. Although a highly sought after convert, Lytton's refreshingly balanced approach to spiritualism - he believed in the phenomena but rejected the explanation (spirits of the dead) - earned him the respect of other sympathetic but critical minds, and the contempt of strict devotees. Lytton likewise believed in the efficacy of magical rituals, but denied that spirits or demons were at all involved; instead he argued that what was at work was some unknown force, directed by the human will, and which would eventually be understood by science, a theme close to the heart of The Coming Race. Lytton had ample opportunity to investigate his theories on at least one occasion. In 1861, with two other witnesses, Lytton observed Eliphas Levi, the celebrated `Professor of Transcendental Magic', raise the shade of Apollonius of Tyana on the roof of the Pantheon, a large store on Regent Street. Levi is generally credited with being a powerful influence on Lytton. But, as Joscelyn Godwin contends, the exact opposite may be true. In which case it is Bulwer-Lytton, and not Levi, as it is usually understood, who was the key figure behind the influential French occult revival of the late 19th century, a development that led directly to what we know as occultism today.

Whatever the case, it is undoubted that Zanoni is one of, if not the most important occult work of the 19th century. Set against the backdrop of the French Revolution and the rise of the Terror, it is a veritable encyclopedia of occult science. Lytton provides lengthy disquisitions on Platonism, Pythagoras and the Neoplatonists; Kabbalah, herbalism, and the notion of correspondences; the gnostic hierarchy of planes, the astral world, elementals, secret societies; occult physiognomy, Mesmer, Cagliostro, and Jacques Cazotte. Ostensibly a melodrama along the lines of Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer (1820), with a complex plot and several characters, Zanoni is an initiation allegory, depicting the responses of its protagonists to the challenges of the spiritual path. Zanoni himself is a kind of cross between the Scarlet Pimpernel and the Comte de Saint Germain, a mysteriously ever-youthful figure, possessing strange powers, who appears when needed and disappears in the blink of an eye. With his mentor Mejnour, a dark, somewhat sinister character- an early prototype of the `coming race' - he is one of the last remaining members of an ancient occult brotherhood, a society of adepts that predates the historical Rosicrucians by millennia; Zanoni, we are told, is at least five thousand years old. Tired of his eternal life, Zanoni wishes to sacrifice his immortality for the love of a woman, the beautiful Viola. Mejnour, who has jettisoned love in favour of the chill satisfactions of occult power, warns him of his wish. Viola, though desirable, is still only a woman, a mere mortal ignorant of the austere realities of the spirit. Glyndon, a promising artist caught between the commands of his soul and the attractions of success, compells Zanoni to present him to Mejnour as a candidate for initiation. The occult action is still thrilling, and the philosophical subtext remains powerful. Zanoni recognizes that the true magician is the artist, and through the novel he remonstrates with Glyndon, urging him to forgo the occult path and to perfect his art. Yet Glyndon, eager and overconfident, rejects Viola, whom he also loves, and gives himself over to Mejnour's charge ... And in the background the repellent Nicot, an opportunistic painter who sells his services to the highest bidder, plots the downfall of all that is superior to him: Lytton's take on the bloodthirsty Jacobins. The book begins with the narrator meeting Glyndon, now an old man, in the occult bookshop of John Denley in Covent Garden, an actual place, well known in early 19th century occult circles. A conversation on Rosicrucianism starts up, and later, after Glyndon's death, the narrator receives a strange manuscript, written in an unknown cipher3S. It is the story

of the remarkable Zanoni. Dickens was later to adapt Lytton's plot and its climactic scene for his own Revolutionary work, The Tale of Two Cities.

Lytton is one of the few artist-magicians who avoided the pessimism and defeat that plagued other devotees of the other world. Perhaps his early encounters with `The Dweller of the Threshold' helped stabilize his personality. Being brought up in an aristocratic household must have helped as well, although during his time of scandal, Lytton faced poverty and calumny, so his life was not always roses. Unlike Nerval or Hoffmann, there is something very down-to-earth about Lytton, and his fascination with the occult never becomes obsessive; hence his attempts to understand it scientifically. In some ways he reminds us of Swedenborg, able to fulfil his responsibilities in this world, as well as in the other. The kernel of Zanoni was with Lytton for many years. Originally based on a dream, it appeared first in a short story "The Tale of Kosem Kosamin the Magician" (1832) and saw magazine publication in an incomplete form as Zicci (1838). The question remains of Lytton's own association with the Rosicrucians, or any other occult society. Although it has been frequently reported that Lytton was a member of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, a kind of precursor to the more well known Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, both Joscelyn Godwin and Golden Dawn scholar Robert Gilbert argue persuasively that this was not the case. That a modern Rosicrucian group would want Lytton is certain. But like his assessment of the spiritualists, Lytton's own evaluation of the organizations he was aware of is not encouraging. In a letter to Hargrave Jennings, author of The Rosicrucians, Their Rites and Their Mysteries (1870) - a book that tells us more about Jennings' obsession with phallic imagery than about the Rosicrucians - Lytton wrote that he possessed the "cipher sign of `the Initiate'," but that the current pretenders to Rosicrucianism could not understand it. He also added darkly that the Rosicrucian Brotherhood still existed, but not under a name recognized by outsiders, which suggests that he did know it, and hence was not an outsider.

There is no record of Lytton joining any Masonic lodges, although it's possible that during a stay in Frankfurt he was initiated into the Asiatic Brethren, a Masonic offshoot whose origins go back to the 18th century heyday of secret societies, and who were believed to have dissolved after the disastrous end of the Illuminati. Yet, in Zanoni itself, and in Lytton's other occult works, there is nothing that could not be discovered in existing works by a diligent student, and Lytton, we know, was an omnivorous reader. But this shouldn't persuade us that he was not a true adept. The esoteric message of Zanoni, wrapped within the cloak of Enlightenment occultism, that the true magician is the inspired artist, is an arcane wisdom on a par with any other.

Eliphas Levi

1875 was a year of occult coincidence or synchronicity, depending on your outlook. It was the year of Edward Alexander - better known as Aleister - Crowley's birth. It was the year Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott formed the Theosophical Society in New York City. And it was also the year that saw the death of Alphonse Louis Constant, author of impassioned, if ill-argued, socialist tracts and who, in the last years of his life, became better known to students of the occult arts as Eliphas Levi, the Professor of Transcendental Magic.

Born in 1810 in Paris, Constant's life as a magician was relatively short, beginning with the publication of Dogme de la Haute Magie in 1854. Prior to that he had earned a living in a number of ways, maintaining a precarious existence on the periphery of the Parisian literary world. His first incarnation, however, was as a priest. The son of a shoemaker, Constant grew up in humble surroundings near the Boulevard Saint Germain, not far from the legendary Cafe Procope, a favourite of Enlightenment luminaries like Denis Diderot. Like many drawn to the mystic path, young Alphonse was dreamy and solitary, and his quick mind and native intelligence impressed the parish priest, who helped to get Alphonse sent to the `little seminary' of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, and from there to Saint Sulpice. Here he studied for the priesthood until he was eventually relieved of the cloth for "preaching doctrines contrary to the Church."

Exactly what those doctrines were is unclear, but it is very likely they had to do with sex. Alphonse's doubts

about the priesthood came in the form of a young girl he tutored for her first Holy Communion. The girl's mother begged Constant to instruct her, saying that a man of his kindness couldn't refuse. In the girl's beautiful blue eyes, he discovered a need for human love. Suddenly the thought of a life of cold renunciation repelled him, and he abandoned the priesthood just before taking his vows. The Church and its doctrines, however, remained a powerful influence, and in his later books he is at pains to argue that there is no essential difference between Christian dogma and magical truth.

Defrocked and jobless, for a time Constant joined a touring theatrical group. A talented artist, he provided illustrations for a magazine called Beautiful Women of Paris and the Provinces, as well as for an edition of Dumas' The Count of Monte Cristo. Later, his hand would depict less fetching shapes, like the darkly popular image of the Baphomet devil, by now reproduced in hundreds of works on Satanism. But Constant's most public persona was as the writer of fiery, if unconvincing, socialist tracts, filled with revolutionary rhetoric. What Constant may have lacked in dialectics he made up for in conviction; one of his works, The Gospel of Liberty (1839), earned him an eight month prison sentence. In the strange history of occult politics, Constant is one of the few occultists with a left bias.

Constant's first experience of occult politics happened through his friendship with Alphonse Esquiros, who was for a time one of Gerard de Nerval's literary acquaintances. Esquiros is forgotten today, but his weird novel The Magician may be due for a rediscovery: the plot includes a harem of dead courtesans, a bronze automaton, and an hermaphrodite who is in love with the moon. Esquiros invited Constant to visit a strange visionary, an aged prophet named Ganneau, who called himself `The Mapah'. Involved in a bizarre messianic royalist intrigue, Ganneau wore a woman's cloak while preaching to his disciples of the creation of the universe and the fall of man. White froth gathered around Ganneau's lips, while his wife, who sat motionless, claimed to be the reincarnation of Marie Antoinette. Ganneau himself said he was Louis XVII. Originally inclined to scoff, Constant was impressed with the weird scene in the Mapah's squalid attic.

Another impressed spectator was a young student named Sobrier who, under the Mapah's influence, believed he was "predestined to save the world by provoking the supreme crisis of universal revolution." A decade later he got a chance to test this theory. Calling for revolution, Sobrier, accompanied by two street Arabs, marched through the streets of Paris, carrying torches, beating time, and gathering a huge crowd. The mob surged through the streets and stopped before the Hotel des Capucines. What happened next.is uncertain, but according to Levi's account, in the confusion a shot was fired, and a riot broke out. The revolution of 1848 had begun.

Constant's personal life was unsatisfying and disappointing, and it was the breakup of his marriage that prompted the transformation into Eliphas Levi. The assistant headmistress of a school became his lover and bore him an illegitimate child. But Constant had become infatuated with one of her students; in 1846, Constant abandoned the headmistress and married seventeen year old Noemie Cadiot. The union was ill-starred; a daughter died at the age six, and soon after her death, Noemie deserted the grief-stricken Alphonse. That a split was imminent may have been obvious. In 1852, a year before Noemie left him, Constant became involved with the eccentric Polish emigre Hoene Wronski. A soldier in the Polish and Russian armies, Wronski studied at the Observatory at Marseilles between 1803 and 1810, where he developed a fantastically complex theory of the origin and structure of the universe. Wronksi was a colleague of the major astronomers and physicists of the day, but his reputation was shredded when he published the results of his findings. These were so outlandish that the Institute of Marseilles forced him to leave; for the rest of his life intellectual persecution and calumny dogged him. Nevertheless, Wronksi was committed to his vision of a universal and fundamental knowledge, and it was this self-belief that ignited the flame of occultism in Constant. Wronski's vision was essentially Pythagorean: that number was the key to the mysteries of the universe. Among other pursuits Wronski devoted himself to a perpetual motion machine, squaring the circle (a solution to which Levi himself would propose), and a `predicting machine' he called the `prognometre'.

Wronski called his synthesis of philosophy, science, politics and religion messianisme, and it was this vision of a unified knowledge that plunged Constant into the deep waters of the Kabbalah. The result was Dogme de la Haute Magie, translated into English as Transcendental Magic (1896) by A.E. Waite. It was

while writing this that Constant's wife left him. Constant contributed to a leftist journal, the Revue Progressive, owned by the Marquis Montferrier. The Marquis became acquainted with the young Noemie and invited her to contribute as well. Sunk into his kabbalistic studies, Constant was unaware that Noemie had become Montferrier's mistress. By the time he did it was too late. Devastated, Constant endured a terrible initiation. He emerged from his trial a changed man. When the Dogme appeared on the Parisian bookstalls Alphonse Louis Constant was no more. In his place stood Eliphas Levi, master of the mystic arts.

Although Levi's writings are full of portentous references to the secret mysteries of the Talmud, the Zohar and other Hebrew texts, he is by most accounts an unreliable guide to the secrets of the Kabbalah, with scant, if any, knowledge of the original tongue. It would be churlish to fault him for adopting the Hebrew equivalent of his name, but readers drawn to his works are often disappointed with what they find. This is a mistake. One doesn't go to Levi for a scholarly interpretation of notoriously difficult texts. One reads him for the sheer fun and romance of his books. In 1801 Francis Barrett, a student of occultism, put together a book on ritual magic called The Magus. Barrett was a friend of the bookseller John Denley, whose Covent Garden bookshop appears in Lytton's Zanoni, and according to most accounts, The Magus is made up of transcriptions of several magical texts Barrett borrowed from Denley. There is no doubt that at least three quarters of The Magus is plagiarized. The information is accurate, if stolen, but Barrett's book did not start an occult revival because, for all its scholarly apparatus, it is a dull read. Levi is never dull. His pages may be riddled with howlers, but you want to turn them, and the reader invariably gets value for money. It was Levi's vision of a magical "doctrine which is everywhere the same and everywhere carefully concealed," which led Madame Blavatsky, among others, to speak of the existence of Asiatic supermen, presiding over the fate of mankind from their remote Himalayan temples: that, and Lytton's notion of a "coming race." Whatever the anthropological and psychological truth about magic, Levi nailed down what the romantic in his readers want magic to be: a mysterious teaching about the other world, shared through the centuries by people like themselves, who have had glimpses of that world and believe in it. Scholars like Gershom Scholem may produce books infinitely more reliable for the academic student of the Jewish mystical traditions. But Levi's The History of Magic will keep you up at night, something, at least for me, Scholem has never done.

In 1853 Levi packed a bag and headed across the Channel to London. As we've seen, there, among other English occultists, he met with Bulwer-Lytton. As Levi's career as a mage had just begun, his reputation can hardly account for this; it seems that he must have been `networking' with other eso- tericists prior to his conversion, which implies that a formidable international occult cabal was well established in the mid-19th century. London was to be the scene of Levi's first major ritual working, his initial attempt to `raise' the spirit of Apollonius of Tyana. The ceremony, commissioned by a mysterious woman in black, took three weeks to accomplish and is described with great relish in Levi's Rituel de la Haute Magie (1856), later published together with the Dogme in a single volume. The account is like something out of Dennis Wheatley. Apparently, the giant figure that appeared was not quite the gentleman Levi had been expecting; the mage fainted and his right arm was numb for days.

After this success, Levi's reputation flourished and other volumes followed, like Le Clef de Grands Mysteres (1861). His renown as the Professor of Transcendental Magic had spread, and his little flat in the Rue des Sevres became a site of pilgrimage. There, devotees of the occult sciences met a rotund man of red complexion, medium height, small piercing eyes, impressive bald cranium, full beard and moustache, invariably wrapped in a monk's robe. His rooms were jammed with occult bric-a-brac. An altar covered in sumptuous drapery supported gilt vessels and a Hebrew scroll of the Law; above this hung a golden triangle with the ineffable Tetragrammaton ('YHVH' the Hebrew name of God) emblazoned on it. Talismans, skulls, magical apparatus and Wronski's `prog- nometre' jostled for space beside a life-size painting of a woman symbolizing the holy Kabbalah.

One visitor to Levi's den was the English occultist Kenneth MacKenzie, a member of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, the group to which Lytton is erroneously claimed to have belonged. During a conversation about the Tarot, MacKenzie noticed a figurine of the Egyptian goddess Isis and remarked on its workmanship. Levi replied that such items were commonplace in Paris, being a very large tobacco jar.

Other, perhaps more perceptive students were the Polish noblemen, Alexander Braszynsky and Georges de Mniszech, and another Pole, Dr. Nowakowski, who lived in Berlin. With his Italian student, Baron Nicolas Joseph Spedalieri, Levi carried on an occult correspondence which was eventually published in nine volumes.

Levi's last days were sad. His hopes for France as the saviour of civilization were crushed with the Franco-Prussian War. The siege of Paris made life difficult, and the commune that followed was not to his liking. In his last years Levi had lost most of his revolutionary fervour; with his body wracked with headaches, dizzy spells, dropsy and gangrene, he had little time for utopias. At two o'clock in the afternoon of 31 May 1875, the Professor of Transcendental Magic passed from this sphere into the next. He may not have known it, but his work would reach an audience much wider than he could ever have expected. Levi influenced a whole generation dissatisfied with orthodox religion and materialist science, eager to recover the lost secrets of ages past. Such mainstream cultural figures as the poets Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud and Andre Breton and the composers Claude Debussy and Erik Satie were some of the beneficiaries of the Professor's magical accomplishments. And in the 1970s, with his name linked to Aleister Crowley's - who claimed Levi as a past incarnation - he would be rediscovered by a generation of head-banging heavy metallers who, like myself, read his books with excitement, pleasure and the occasional grain of salt.

Charles Baudelaire

Like Hoffmann, Poe and Nerval, Baudelaire is one of the tragedies of literature. Dead at the age of 46, he produced only a small body of work, and his reputation rests effectively on a single collection of poems, the infamous Les Fleurs du mal (1857). Nevertheless, this seemingly meagre output was perhaps the single most influential work written by a poet in the 19th century. To the contemporary reader, Baudelaire's friend Nerval remains pretty much unknown, and Gautier, to whom he dedicated Les Fleurs du mal, is mostly forgotten, even in his own country. Outside of thesis papers, others of the late Romantic milieu in which Baudelaire moved languish in oblivion. Yet the author of these dark, sensuous and highly mystical poems remains - aptly, as we shall see - a symbol of decadence and Satanism and, in recent years, has acquired a second lease on life as the character of the `flaneur' or urban wanderer, made popular through the writings of another tragic figure, the German Jewish literary critic Walter Benjamin. Hoffmann, Poe and Nerval all antedate Baudelaire as poets of the city, but it is Baudelaire who is associated with the aimless strolling and chance encounters with `found beauty' that, since the surrealists, have informed an often faddish and trendy taste for urban aesthetics.

Charles Baudelaire was born in Paris in 1821. His mother, Caroline Archimbaut-Dufays was twenty-eight; his father, Joseph-Francois Baudelaire, sixty-one. Baudelaire's father was a scholar with a courtly manner; he was also a man of strong religious feeling. All three traits would pass to his son, along with a less desirable inheritance to which his mother contributed as well. Baudelaire's step-brother, Claude-Alphonse - from his father's previous marriage - died in 1862 from a cerebral haemorrhage that had first left him paralysed. Baudelaire's mother would end her days suffering from aphasia, as would her son. The story of Baudelaire's early death lays the blame on his dissipated lifestyle, but it is clear fate was probably against him from the beginning.

Baudelaire's early years were happy. He grew up in comfortable surroundings, and both parents loved him deeply. His father instilled in the young boy an interest in Latin and painting. But then, around the age of six, young Charles was thrust out of Paradise. His father died and the following year, 1828, his mother remarried. For a normal family it was a good choice. Colonel Aupick - four years older than Caroline - was handsome, responsible, and destined for success; he would eventually become commander of the Paris garrison, an ambassador to Constantinople and Madrid, and a senator under the Second Empire. But to sensitive, solitary Charles, it was a misalliance. Although the colonel tried to be friends with the boy, they had little in common, and early on, Baudelaire cast him in the role of the ignorant, yet powerful philistine. Throughout his life Colonel Aupick would remain an authoritarian figure, a stern Jehovah against whom the later Satanist and revolutionary would rail.

Baudelaire was sent to college in Lyons, then later to the Lycee Louis-le-Gerard in Paris. Here he excelled in Greek and Latin. After receiving his baccalaureat, it was time for him to choose a career. Colonel Aupick suggested a position as a secretary in an embassy. Charles told him he wanted to be a poet. The flowers of evil had started to sprout.

Although both his mother and Colonel Aupick were against it, Baudelaire threw himself into what he imagined was a proper environment in which to produce poetry. He read insatiably and he began to frequent prostitutes in the Latin Quarter, from one of whom he more than likely contracted the syphilis that would kill him. His appetite for experience understandably worried his family. Hoping to save him they packed him off on a voyage to India, the journey to the east that Nerval had just embarked on. Baudelaire jumped ship at Mauritius and returned to Paris in 1842, more determined than ever to be a poet. He came into his inheritance and threw himself with gusto into the life of the aesthete and dandy, living lavishly and renting an apartment in the Hotel Pimodan on the Ile Saint-Louis, where he occasionally ate hashish with other members of the notorious Club des Haschichins. It was around this time that Baudelaire met the mulatto woman Jeanne Duval, with whom he became infatuated and with whom he enjoyed, if that is the - correct word, a masochistic relationship. Though beautiful and exotic, Jeanne Duval was illiterate, unfaithful, malicious and, for a good part of the time, drunk. It is difficult to see what Baudelaire saw in her, except for the typical Romantic need for an impossible love affair. (Like Novalis and Nerval, Baudelaire became deeply obsessed with unattainable women, and remained devoted to his mother throughout his life; she too had absolutely no understanding of his genius.) It is also possible that, as one critic suggests, Baudelaire's early sexual exploits left him impotent, and somehow Duval could understand and minister to his more voyeuristic tastes.36

Two years after receiving his inheritance Baudelaire had run through half of it, a considerable splurge, as the initial sum was 100,000 francs, more than twice Nerval's fortune. Against his protests, Colonel Aupick arranged for a conseil judiciarie to administer his stepson's finances. Humiliated, henceforth Baudelaire was to live on a small allowance and whatever he could make from writing which, like Poe, Nerval and Hoffmann, would never be very much. For the rest of his life he was poor. One result of Colonel Aupick's decision was the poet's failed suicide attempt; another was having his first writings published, a collection of criticism, his Salon of 1845, followed by his second Salon of 1846. These established Baudelaire as one of the most perceptive art critics of the time. The second Salon also presented an idea that would feature largely in his later work and, indeed, as the central theme of the Symbolist Movement to come.

Baudelaire had first come across the notion of synesthesia in Hoffmann's Kreisleriana. There Hoffmann remarked that when listening to music he invariably associated the different tones and melodies with colours and scents. Likewise, certain perfumes had a strange effect on him: the scent of brown and red marigolds sent him into a deep reverie, in which he heard a low oboe sound in the distance. He suggested that all these things - colours, sounds, scents - are aspects of a single reality, a ray of pure light, diffracted by the senses. Baudelaire adopted Hoffmann's idea and applied it to the arts in general, thus inaugurating the age of Symbolism, and preparing the way for Walter Pater's remark that all art aspires toward the condition of music. Later Baudelaire would also find a similar sensibility in the work of Richard Wagner.

Hoffmann's notion also prepared Baudelaire for the two most important influences on his work: Poe and Swedenborg. Baudelaire had come across Poe's work in 1847 and soon became obsessed with it, pestering friends with incessant questions about the American poet whose sensibilities so resembled his own. There is a story of Baudelaire hearing about an American writer visiting Paris. He forced his way into the man's hotel room, and discovered him trying on a new suit of clothes. Baudelaire nevertheless harangued him with questions about Poe which the writer kindly answered. What Baudelaire recognized in Poe was his mysticism; he saw him as a man obsessed with confronting the mysteries of existence, a notion that Poe himself would have appreciated. Since Poe's death Baudelaire saw him as a kind of guardian angel, a poetic intercessor on behalf of struggling humanity. During his lifetime Baudelaire was best known as a translator of Poe - the first story he translated was "Mesmeric Revelation" - and the only substantial amounts of money he made came from this work. Curiously, although Baudelaire had ample reason in his own life to adopt the notion, it is in "Mesmeric Revelation" that Poe offers suffering as the

means of preparing oneself for the world to come.'

Poe's search for an ideal beauty and his image as a suffering poet confronting the profound ambiguity of existence made Baudelaire receptive to Swedenborg's ideas. It's unclear when or how he first came across them. More than likely it was through reading Balzac, possibly Seraphita, although it is probable that he read Swedenborg's Heaven and Hell and Doctrine of the New Jerusalem, both of which were available in French translations. The idea of the poet as a visionary was powerful in Baudelaire (he called Balzac la voyant) and it is after his encounter with Swedenborg's ideas that a mystical, spiritual atmosphere pervades his work. That sensibility is most obvious in what is perhaps Baudelaire's most famous and influential poem, "Correspondances."

Much has been made of Baudelaire's Satanism, which is really a misnomer and will be looked at in the next section. But if Baudelaire's supposed aesthetic of evil produced an embarrassing number of second rate poets maudit, the mystical vision of "Correspondances" has been even more influential. Reams have been written about it and it is no exaggeration to say that out of these fourteen lines the aesthetic philosophy of the next half century emerged. Taking Hoffmann's remarks about synesthesia and Swedenborg's notion of a spiritual world, Baudelaire puts the poet/artist in the position of a kind of decoder, an expert at deciphering secret messages. Given Poe's penchant for ciphers and hidden clues, it all begins to make a great deal of sense: the poet/artist for Baudelaire is like Poe's eccentric detective, C. Auguste Dupin, who, in "The Purloined Letter" recognizes what is obscure to the average person and is, quite literally, staring him in the face. Only in this case, what is hidden is not only a stolen letter, but the secret meaning of existence, encoded in the landscape of the natural world. Everything in this world is a symbol of a corresponding reality in the spiritual world. In Swedenborg, this arrangement is often presented in a dry, matter of fact manner, a fixed one-to-one relation between natural `signifier' and spiritual `signified'. But Baudelaire loosens this arrangement, and opens the interpretations to a degree of creative ambiguity. Symbolism emerges as an art of nuance, allusion, metaphor, mood. The direct statement is eschewed in favour of suggestion, the general sense that the artist and poet is always gesturing to a world of wider, deeper significance, much like dreams. But also like dreams, the attempt to capture the meaning directly often destroys it. Hence the hazy, shifting, ambivalent, twilight atmosphere of Symbolist art: an atmosphere having much in common with the hypnagogic states that gave birth to it.

Baudelaire argued that the poet must become receptive to the meanings passing to him through the medium of the external world (which also means that he must become a good critic). And as we can never know when or where the spirit will speak, there must then be no restrictions on experience. This, as much as any need to shock the bourgeoisie, accounts for Baudelaire's capacity to find beauty in things that the average person would abhor. This opens the door to decadence, to a sensibility that will respond only to a beauty that carries the seed of corruption: a sensibility that clearly becomes dominant as the century progresses. That Baudelaire knew about corruption goes without saying. One example is his hideously beautiful poem "A Carcass," in which the poet reminisces with his lover about a corpse they came across on a morning walk. "Her legs," he writes, "were spread out like a lecherous whore/Sweating out poisonous fumes/Who opened in slick invitational style/her stinking and festering womb."

No wonder when the book was published in 1857 it was immediately taken from the bookstalls and its author tried for obscenity. Baudelaire never recovered from the public outrage, although he continued to write, producing minor classics like his essay on drugs and poetry, Les Paradis Artiiciels (1860), which, in a translation by Aleister Crowley, became something of an underground success in the 1960s. But his own health was failing, and his reputation as a decadent preceded him everywhere: it was not until 1949 that the obscenity conviction was finally overturned. A lecture tour of Belgium in 1864 proved a disaster, and in 1866 he suffered a series of strokes which left him paralysed and aphasic. A collection of prose poems later published as Paris Spleen were his final efforts. The syphilis contracted as an aspirant poet had entered its final phase, and after lingering in squalour in Belgium for a time, he was brought back to Paris where on 31 August 1867 he died.

Villiers de l'Isle-Adam

The name jean Marie Mathias Philippe Auguste Villiers de 1'Isle-Adam is not, I suspect, one on everybody's lips, and even for students of the occult and the bizarre it is still not encountered very much these days. Villiers de l'Isle-Adam is perhaps the most poignant embodiment, if we can use so robust a term for so ethereal a character, of the Symbolist ethic that came to dominate the aesthetic and philosophical consciousness of Europe in the last years of the 19th century. Barely known in his native France until the end of his life, Villiers is remembered today, if at all, for being the author of the archetypal Symbolist drama Axel in which, within a dense forest of occult verbiage and world-renouncing metaphor, there emerges one of the great one-liners of all time. When, just before downing the poison that will consummate for eternity their spiritual love, the beautiful Sara suggests to the ennui ridden Rosicrucian aesthete Axel, that they share at least one night of passion, Axel rejects the idea with disdain. "0 Sara," he cries. "Tomorrow I would be prisoner of your splendid body. Its delights would have fettered the chaste energy impelling me at this instant. But ... suppose our transports should die away, suppose some accursed hour would strike when our love, paling, would be consumed by its own flames ... Oh! let's not wait for that sad hour ..." Sara, not yet entirely convinced that suicide is their best option, and symbol of the fertile but futile vitality that Axel is determined to renounce, compresses her plea into a single cry: "Come, live!"

"Life?" asks Axel. "No.- Our existence is already full and its cup runneth over! What hourglass could measure the hours of this night? The future? ... we have exhausted it ... As for living? Our servants will do that for us.

Expecting his servants to do his living for him is an apt sentiment for a character like Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. For one thing, it was something he was determined not to do for himself, for another, Villiers came from an aristocratic family who could look back on at least eight centuries of unbroken nobility- which means, one imagines, quite a few servants. Among his distinguished ancestors was jean de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (1384-1437), Marshal of France; PhillipeAuguste de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (1464-1534), founder of the Order of the Knights of Malta; and Pierre de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (?), Grand Standard-Bearer of France in the battle of Roosebeke in 1382. Villiers never forgot the noble line of his descent, which was to him a source both of great pride and considerable inconvenience. Pride in that he could fall back on it when facing a world that invariably proved unwieldy, if not hostile; inconvenient in that it was precisely this aristocratic inheritance that prevented him from rolling up his sleeves and getting down to work when faced with an obstacle. For Mallarme, along with Baudelaire and Wagner one of Villiers' close friends, he was "The man who never was, save in his dreams." For Arthur Symons, who introduced the English speaking world to Villiers in his classic book The Symbolist Movement in Literature (1899), he was "The Don Quixote of Idealism." For the philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev, Villiers was one of a group of late 19th century writers who "hated the bourgeois world ... with a holy hatred. .. . adapted to nothing: their whole lives were spent in poverty, failure and lack of recognition. "M Even more than Baudelaire or Nerval, Villiers was a man who, while having the unmanifest light of the Ideal in his sight, was constitutionally unable to come to grips with the world. And even more than Baudelaire and Nerval, he sank into an increasingly pathetic destitution, a life of such minimal physical comfort that, were he an orthodox member of the Catholic Church he so fervently accepted, he would by now have possibly been canonized.

Villiers de l'Isle-Adam was born in 1838 into a family whose noble ancestry made it a target for the Revolution. Living in very reduced circumstances, their financial destiny was made even more precarious by the impracticable and invariably failed dreams of success entertained by Villiers' father, who systematically threw away what little savings and property they retained in a series of absurd get-rich-quick schemes. One fantasy, however, was shared by the entire family: the notion that young Mathias - as Villiers was known to the family - was destined to restore the family honour by becoming a famous writer, and its coffers, by marrying a rich heiress. Villiers did try to make good these expectations: the first by writing some of the most remarkable works of the late 19th century; the second by proposing to a wealthy young English woman. Reports are that the lady, introduced to Villiers by a friend with whom he had entered into a contract to provide him with a wife worth at least three million francs, was so terrified of the poet's passion and lengthy recitations that she escaped from their assignation in Covent Garden as quickly as possible.

Disappointment, recriminations, and the return of the clothes Villiers had borrowed for the affair followed. Some sense of lost riches from ages long ago is always in the background of Villiers work; the interest in actual riches is evident, but like the hero of Potocki's Saragossa Manuscript, the allusion to alchemical gold (i.e., esoteric wisdom) is not to be discounted.

The three million franc wife is just one of several incidents that put Villiers' eccentricities in the same rank as Nerval's lobster. Others were his candidacy to fill the vacant throne of Greece in 1863; his frequent disappearances and equally bizarre re-appearances in Paris after several weeks absence; the reports of his occult retreats in the Abbey of Solesme; his penchant for adorning his ill-fitting and threadbare clothes with an assortment of ostentatious heraldic decorations; his need to borrow suitable dress for the aristocratic evenings he was invited to, while at the same time he was not far from starving; the duel he nearly fought when a second rate writer vilified his name in a cheap melodrama. For the first thirty years of his life, Villiers lived in relative comfort, oscillating between the world of high society and the bohemian underground, an aristocrat among the poets, and vice versa. Landing in Paris in his early twenties, his aunt financed the publication of his Premieres Poesies in 1859. Published to hardly any notice, Villiers had at least introduced himself to the Parisian literary scene, a milieu he was to occupy for the rest of his life. He made friends, Baudelaire as mentioned, and also Catulle Mendes and Jean Marras. By the 1860s, he was recognized by litterateurs like Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, Theodore Banville, Flaubert, Mallarme and others; by all he was considered an exceptional character and a writer of genius although for the public at large he was a nonentity. In 1862 he published the first volume of his philosophical romance Isis, also known as Wilhelm de Strally and Prolegomenes. Like so many of his other works, this was never completed; like Coleridge and De Quincey, Villiers had the raconteur's habit of talking a good book in cafes, and later feeling too bored with the idea to set it to paper. Others who listened often did, to their profit and Villiers loss. (He was, by all reports, a considerable showman, his satiric recitations featuring the character of Tribulat Bonhomet generally bringing the house down.)

By this time Villiers had become obsessed with the melange of Catholicism, Hegelianism and the occult that would constitute his literary and philosophical world. He read Balzac's mystical novels, was a sometime disciple of Eliphas Levi, and his friendship with Baudelaire introduced him to notions of Satanism and the hermetic theme of correspondences. Hegel, however, may seem an odd bedfellow for these mystic influences, until we recall that one of the most powerful, if little known inspirations for Hegel's dialectic were the writings of Jacob Boehme. But more than any specific idea - and the breadth of Villiers' reading often exceeded his grasp - what Villiers drew from these sources was a general spirit of profound idealism, a rejection of bourgeois materialism, of progress, science and common sense: even of physical embodiment. As his translator Robert Martin Adams remarks, Villiers could "walk down a public thoroughfare like a man from another planet."" He was a creature from "another sphere," an angel fallen to earth. "Go beyond," was the family motto, and Villiers took this to heart. As he wrote in Axel, he lived "out of politeness"; it was only his good manners and aristocratic upbringing that forced him to remain in this realm at all.

A look at Villiers' life suggests that such noblese oblige provided him with the most tenuous of footings. By the 1870s, the financial support of his aunt was exhausted, and Villiers embarked on a journey to the underworld unprecedented, even by the standards of Baudelaire or Nerval. For the next twenty years he was generally cold for lack of clothes, hungry for lack of food, and sleepless for lack of a room. He salvaged what he could from rubbish bins, and begged for second hand rags. He took whatever demeaning jobs he could find, but only as a last resort. For sixty francs a month he was a sparring partner at a gym, basically getting knocked around to earn his pittance. He worked with a snake oil merchant, posing as a cripple until swallowing the quack remedy. One winter he slept at a construction site, waking one morning to the watchman's boot grinding in his face. It is said that he wrote his occult science fiction novel Tomorrow's Eve (which features Thomas Edison as a kind of Rosicrucian inventor of an artificial woman) on the bare floor of a squalid room; whatever furniture he had went to the pawnshop. His frequent disappearances were a sign that things had got even worse than this. The aristocrat in him refused to allow others to see his most pitiful degradations. After his death from cancer and general neglect in 1889, when his friend Mallarme was asked about Villiers' life, he replied: "His life - I search for anything that corresponds to that expression: truly and in the ordinary sense, did he live?"

It wasn't until 1883, with the publication of Contes cruels, that Villiers began to receive anything like the recognition he deserved. He had been writing for more than twenty years, but his noble soul refused to have anything to do with ambition and success, unless it was the ambition of genius and the success of great art. Unlike others, he would not, or perhaps could not, adapt himself to the requirements of a market. Like Poe, whose own bizarre stories were one of Villiers' models, perfection and beauty were his standards. The contrast between his goals and the milieu of their expression could not be greater: most of Villiers' `cruel tales' were written on dirty scraps of paper stained with the wine or absinthe of the cafes he inhabited. The tales were Villiers' first public success, and they consolidated his reputation as a high priest of Symbolism, too late, however, to do him much good. Throughout the collection, Villiers attacked the reigning scientific positivism and bourgeois obsession with progress, declaring his belief in an assortment of magical ideas: reincarnation, spiritualism, precognition. As.his biographer A.W. Raitt remarks, Villiers was "fascinated by the intervention in human affairs of mysterious, otherworldly forces, the existence of which in his work is a constant challenge to the assumptions of materialism ..."4"

Notes

I J.L. Talmon Romanticism and Revolt (London: Thames and Hudson, 196 7) p. 145.

2 See Colin Wilson The Craft of the Novel (London: Gollanz, 1975).

3 Letter from Abbot Johannes Trithemius to Johann Virdung, quoted in Hans Christoph Binswanger Money and Magic: A Critique of the Modern Economy in the Light of Goethe's Faust (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) pp. 1-2. The Abbot had other alchemical acquaintances, being the teacher of Paracelsus and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa.

4 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Autobiography (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) p. 3, translated by John Oxenford.

5 Ronald D. Gray Goethe the Alchemist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952) For anyone interested in tracing the influence of occult ideas on Goethe's writing, Gray's book is the obvious and indispensable start. Gray argues that Goethe's early fascination with alchemy and magic remained a core influence on his entire body of work, and his book is a meticulous examination of the occult roots of Goethe's interest in and studies of mineralogy, botany, anatomy, meteorology, as well as his literary pursuits.

6 Ibid. p. 371.

7 One thinks of Wagner's Tristan, Mahler's adagio from the Fifth Symphony, and the opening sequence of Schoenberg's Gurrelieder.

8 Arthur Versluis, Introduction to Novalis: Pollen and Fragments (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1989) p. 9.

9 John Neubauer, Novalis (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980) p. 15.

10 See the excellent introduction to Hoffmann's The Life and Opinions of The Tomcat Murr (London: Penguin Books, 1999).

11 Hoffmann's tale can be seen as an essay in Blake's idea of `single vision'. In different ways, both the philistines and the insane suffer a form of this; it is only the magician and poet who can perceive reality's dual aspect.

12 A good argument has been made for Hoffmann's green snakes to have their source in his own hypnagogic experiences. See Jurij Moskvitin An Essay on the Origin of Thought (1973). This, of course, does not rule out any alchemical associations, as it is arguable that the alchemists themselves made use of hypnagogia. See Jung's writings on `active imagination'.

13 For an investigation into the circumstances surrounding Poe's death, see Midnight Dreary: The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998) by John Walsh.

14 Daniel Hoffman Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972) p. 206.

15 Edgar Allan Poe in The Unknown Poe (San Francisco: City Lights, 1980) p. 42.

16 For a fascinating survey of Poe's alchemical tales, see Randall A. Clack's "Strange Alchemy of Brain: Poe and Alchemy" in A Companion to Poe Studies, Eric W. Carlson ed., (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996) pp. 367-387.

17 See Harold Beaver's introduction to The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976).

18 For what it's worth, a similar material spirituality was espoused by the enigmatic Armenian teacher G.I. Gurdjieff who argued that everything, including ideas, was material. See P.D. Ouspensky's In Search of the Miraculous (1949) for a detailed account of Gurdjieff's teaching.

19 Stefan Zweig Balzac (London: Cassell, 1947) p. 163.

20 Robert Darnton Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass. 1968) p. 128.

21 Gerard de Nerval: Selected Writings, translated and with an Introduction and Notes by Richard Sieburth, (London: Penguin Books, 1999) p. x.

22 It is interesting to note that the term Bohemian, meaning an unconventional way of life, derives from 16th century Bohemia, whose capital Prague, under the rule of Rudolph II, was a haven for alchemists, magicians, astrologers and Rosicrucians, attracting, among others, such figures as the polymath John Dee and his disreputable associate, Edward Kelly. See Francis Yates' The Rosicrucian Enlightenment.

23 Ibid. p. xv.

24 Ibid. P. xx.

25 C.G. Jung Memories, Dreams, Reflections (London: Flamingo, 1983) pp. 201, 214.

26 Rene Daumal Powers of the Word (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1994).

27 A good English introduction to Nerval's hermeticism is Gerard de Nerval The Mystic's Dilemma by Bettina L. Knapp (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980).

28 Ibid. p.105.

29 Sieburt p. xxii.

30 Norman Glass, Introduction to his translation of Journey to the Orient (London: Peter Owen, 1972) p. 18.

31 He is also, incidentally, responsible for the phrase "The pen is mightier than the sword."

32 For Bulwer-Lytton's link to the Nazis and the occult, see Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier classic The Morning of the Magicians (1963). Later scholars, most notably Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (The Occult Roots of Nazism (1985)), have exploded Pauwels' and Bergier's contentions, but they still make for good reading.

33 E.G.E. Bulwer-Lytton The Coming Race (Alan Sutton Publishing: Phoenix Mill, 1995) pp. 8, 10.

34 Joscelyn Godwin The Theosophical Enlightenment (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1994) p. 195.

35 It is possible that this weird script is the model for Blavatsky's Senzar, the prehistoric language of The Book of Dzyan.

36 Joanna Richardson, Introduction to Baudelaire Selected Poems (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books,

1975) p. 12.

37 Another source of the philosophy of suffering was Baudelaire's friend Eliphas Levi, or rather Alphonse Louis Constant (he hadn't yet changed his name). Baudelaire and Constant met on several occasions and worked together on at least one project, a scandalous book entitled Les Mysteres Galans des Theatres de Paris, a sort of mid-19th century equivalent of Hollywood Babylon. He and Constant were also briefly members of Blanqui's political organization, the Societe Repub- licaine Central. In 1845, a decade before becoming a magician, Constant published a book entitled Le Livre des Larmes, an essay on the value of suffering as a moral force which we can assume Baudelaire was aware of. Curiously, Constant had also written and published a poem entitled Correspondances in the following year.

38 Nicolas Berdyaev The Meaning of the Creative Act (New York: Collier Books, 1962) p. 223.

39 Robert Martin Adams Introduction to Tomorrow's Eve, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982) p. x.

40 A.W. Raitt Introduction to Cruel Tales, Villiers de 1'Isle-Adam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) translated by Robert Baldick, p. x.

Satanic Occultism

Although in the popular mind it's seen as synonymous with occultism, Satanism proper is actually only , small branch of the occult, one that sprang out of the main trunk in relatively recent times; the ancient hermetic writings, for example, the central body of alchemical and esoteric knowledge, have no concept of a Devil nor make any mention of an evil principle. By definition Satanism and a Satanist require the existence of Satan, and although there are references to Satan in the Old Testament, most notably in the Book of job, it wasn't until Christianity had established itself in late antiquity that the idea of a being dedicated to evil, whose task it was to lead human beings to perdition, became a fixture of western consciousness.

There were earlier embodiments of a dark principle. Ahriman, in Zoroastrianism the enemy of Ahura Mazda, is a kind of prototype Devil, and in the 20th century, the esotericist Rudolf Steiner was to call one of the "supersensible" beings who impede human spiritual evolution by that name. But Ahriman is more of a cosmic or ontological principle, the `yin' to Ahura Mazda's `yang', than what we would consider a prince of darkness. In the early years of Christianity the Gnostics, whose teachings would be incorporated with the hermetic writings to form the basic foundation of occult ideas, spoke of a "demiurge," a kind of blind, idiot god who created the earth and rules over it. Hence the need to escape from material reality. For the Gnostics, as for William Blake, this demiurge was associated with the Jehovah of the Bible (Blake calls him Nobodaddy). This gave rise to a tradition of `reversal' in which some biblical villains, like the Serpent, Cain, and Simon Magus, are seen as Gnostic heroes, a tradition that Blake himself participated in, as well as more recent writers like the novelist Hermann Hesse, whose Demian is full of Gnostic re-readings of biblical tales.

As mentioned, Satan is a central character in the Book of Job, but there he is not depicted as the embodiment of all that is evil. He is, rather, a kind of prosecuting attorney, sent by God to test his people. Satan in Hebrew means "adversary," and in the Book of Job, Satan has God's mandate to try the belief of his followers. Devil in the New Testament comes from diabolos, Greek for "slanderer" or "accuser". By Christian times, Satan's position has changed; he no longer ferrets out the weak of faith and has become something more like the Devil we know. Perhaps his most spectacular appearance is during Jesus' forty days in the desert, where he tempts Christ by offering him dominion over the world, or tries to trick him into proving his divinity by using his magical powers.

In Christian mythology the story of the Devil's origin is that he was one of God's angels, Lucifer (light-bearer), who, through pride, fell from heaven and took up residence in hell. After the Second Coming, he will be released once again for a brief time, only to be bound once more by Christ and thrown into darkness for another millennia. Satan has, of course, other names: Beelzebub, "Lord of the Flies", for example, a title given him because of the buzzing sound made by his demons. But Lucifer is the most enduring and it is the one that embodies the satanic aspect that has got the most literary mileage. It was Milton's Paradise Lost, which featured a Satan who would rather reign in hell than serve in heaven, that gave rise to our notions of satanic hubris and `Luciferic pride'.' It is this element in the satanic character that would attract many devotees during the Romantic period.

Satanism proper got its start in the 17th century, although Catholic apologists would argue that earlier heretical sects like the Gnostics, Manichees, Bogomils, Albigensians and Cathars were in league with the Devil. The tales of depravity and demonic worship associated with these groups must, however, be taken with several grains of salt, as it is clear the Church fathers writing about them were less than unbiased. The beliefs of the Cathars and Albigensians, ruthlessly exterminated by the Church, had less to do with satanic worship than with refusing to acknowledge the papal throne as the sole arbiter of spiritual truth. The first thing a conquering religion does is make devils of the gods it has replaced, and in the case of the Cathars and other radical Christian sects, this is exactly what the Catholic Church did. Bogomil means "God lover" and Cathar means "pure;" what was demonic about these groups is that they practised a dualistic Christianity based more on actual Gospel teaching than the power oriented ideology of the Church.

According to the occult historian Francis King, Satanism as we know it has its roots in the belief in the magical efficacy of the Catholic Mass.' The doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the sacramental

offerings was widespread by 700 AD; this led to the belief that any priest, whatever his character, simply by virtue of his being a priest, could, through the ritual of the Mass, transform the communion bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. That this is a variation on magical spells and incantations is clear: the Mass itself, through its magical words, and the priest, through his initiation, had power, and it was only a matter of time before it was abused. Priests of weak virtue were quite prepared to perform Masses for various purposes in return for material gifts. The `Black Mass', a mainstay of satanic occultism, was originally another name for a Requiem Mass, given in aid of the souls in Purgatory. By the 7th century, the Council of Toledo had to ban their use as a magical means of murder. Masses could be said for other purposes as well, and it was not long before a kind of underground magical literature grew up around the practice. One such text was the Grimoire of Hono- rius, a handbook of magical rituals, which included among its occult preparations the saying of Mass. The Protestant Revolution, born of Luther's grievances against ecclesiastical abuse, was basically a rejection of the Church's position as an hierarchical initiatory society, possessing a magical, and frequently profitable, intimacy with God.

From employing the Mass for magical purposes to petitioning and worshipping the Devil himself marks the transition from spiritual abuse to actual Satanism. The first documented and most well known case of this took place in Paris in the late 1670s. There were, of course, earlier incidences of what we would call satanic evil: one thinks of Vlad the Impaler and Marshal Gilles de Rais, whose exploits will form a central part of perhaps the most well known satanic novel, J.K. Huysmans' Ld Bas. But although both of these characters embodied a demonic sadism, and were what we would undoubtedly consider evil, in the late 17th century, all the elements of satanic worship came together in a powerful and influential mixture.

In her book The Affair of the Poisons, Frances Mossiker tells the bizarre story of a satanic ring responsible for murder, infanticide, weird sex and the attempted assassination of Louis XIV. In 1678, Nicolas de la Reynie, Police Commissioner of Paris, uncovered the existence of a widespread satanic cult, centred around a fortune-teller named Catherine Deshayes, also known as La Voisin, whose circle included several priests and whose most notable devotee was Madame de Montespan, mistress of Louis XIV. La Voisin admitted to concocting noxious potions for wives eager to be rid of their husbands, as well as to being the most industrious abortionist of her time: Francis King reports that the ashes of some 2,000 infants were found buried in her garden. But this was not the extent of her enormity. In order to remain in the king's favour and to spoil the hopes of any rival, Madame de Montespan engaged La Voisin and her accomplice, the Abbe Guibourg, known to have murdered dozens of children, to perform Black Masses. These were not merely Requiems used for evil purposes, but full blown satanic affairs which included child sacrifice, a naked woman as an altar, and offerings to demons like Asmodeus and Ashtaroth. The child's entrails and blood would be secretly mixed into Louis' dinner that evening. Masses like these had been performed for several years, the first taking place in 1673, but eventually Louis lost interest in his satanic concubine and, one would hope, his diet. Love turned to hate, and Madame de Montespan plotted the king's death. The plot failed, and when La Reynie made his swoop, some 360 people were arrested.

It was this sort of thing that appealed to the fin de siecle taste for what we might call satanic decadence. But by the late 19th century, the fascination with evil as a means of stimulating a flagging consciousness was widespread. Essential to the Black Mass is a meticulous "revaluation of values," in which the sacramental elements are reversed: the most obvious emblem of this is the cross turned upside down.' Sex, urine, and ordure were included in the rituals as well. Silly, but in their heyday they were the height, or depth, of depravity.

Yet along with the idea of Satan as the archetypal rebel or fount of forbidden pleasure, among some writers in the late 19th century, a different picture of the Devil arose. In The Brothers Karamazov Fyodor Dostoyevsky presented the Devil as a rather shabby, down at heel customer, a seedy petit bourgeois who wears checked trousers and has just had himself vaccinated for smallpox. Dostoyevsky knew that the image of the Devil as a kind of superman, beyond good and evil, gave a dangerous carte blanche to a generation of anarchists and atheists convinced that "nothing is true" and "everything permitted." His influence, however, has been minimal, and a new generation of satanic rebels - comprised today mainly of heavy metal headbangers - finds it all too easy to have some sympathy for the Devil.

Charles Baudelaire II

Baudelaire's Satanism was touched on earlier. Like all young Romantics, early in his career Baudelaire espoused what we could call a satanic, or certainly a decadent philosophy of life. Along with Gerard de Nerval and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Baudelaire indulged in several eccentricities. Among other things he died his hair green more than a century before any punk thought of it. As Enid Starkie recounts in her biography, as a young aspiring dandy, Baudelaire threw himself into the flamboyant lifestyle expected of fledgling poets. His father's inheritance allowed him a considerable latitude. As mentioned, he furnished his rooms lavishly and frequently changed the decor, selling furniture and pictures he had tired of at a discount well before paying for them, then purchasing new ones, and thus acquiring some of the life-long debts that would crush him. He papered his rooms in red and black and hung curtains of heavy damask. His library consisted of rare volumes of French, Renaissance and Latin poets. Hidden cupboards contained an impressive collection of liqueurs. Delacroix adorned the walls, thick carpets muffled the urban cacophony, and voluptuous perfumes filled the air. This atmosphere of sensuous and aesthetic refinement would be codified years later in Huysmans' influential novel A Rebours.

While he could afford it, Baudelaire's own appearance rivalled that of his rooms. He was often seen in a black velvet tunic, gold belt, skin-tight trousers, patent-leather shoes, white silk socks, a white linen blouse opened at the neck to reveal a scarlet tie, the whole ensemble accentuated by his pale pink gloves. On nights when the Club des Haschichins met, Baudelaire and his friends sat noisily around his elegant walnut table, waving daggers and swords, stoned out of their minds. His neighbours would sometimes complain, and Baudelaire would excuse himself for the noise and explain that he had only been dragging his mistress around the floor by her hair. In the cafes he would epater le boheme by remarking that he was the son of an unfrocked priest, or regale them with stories of how he murdered his father. On one occasion he complained of an evening meal that the cheese had a faint odour of child's brains. That Baudelaire relished these antics is clear, and he made a point of ratcheting up his demonic reputation by speaking of his erotic need for freaks, or by demanding of one respectable madame that she allow him to hang her from his ceiling, bite her succulent white flesh and make love to her. To Baudelaire's regret, the lady declined.'

Baudelaire's behaviour wasn't anything new, the Bouzingos of an earlier generation - Nerval, Petrus Borel, Theophile Dondey - had already dotted most of these i's and crossed nearly all the t's. But unlike many of the Romantic wild boys, Baudelaire's sensibilities matured, and through "implacable life" he learned to appreciate more man's satanic weakness and less his adolescent rebellion. Although he is considered a high priest of modernity, throughout his later years Baudelaire maintained a belief that we consider positively medieval: the actual existence of the Devil. Baudelaire's choice of themes - corpses, prostitutes, drunkenness, disease: in general, evil - lead a superficial reader to believe he revelled in these things. The truth is that Baudelaire is an old fashioned moralist, and he was reviled by his contemporaries less for his embrace of the dark side than for his unflagging insistence that we face these elements in ourselves. Although the reports of his deathbed conversion, like those of Rimbaud, are unconvincing at best, Baudelaire clearly did believe in Original Sin. Man is a fallen creature, and it is the task of the poet to remind him of his lost heritage. Yet it is clear that the Symbolist aesthetic, the idea that the external world is a mere cipher, leads almost naturally to an embrace of the rejected and repressed, to that which the healthy, plodding, insensitive mind casts aside as worthless. Hence Baudelaire's discovery of beauty in the sick, decrepit and ugly which, clearly, is another form of reversal.

Arthur Rimbaud

When Baudelaire died, it was as a critic and translator that he was known, if at all. Even his closest friends, like Theodore de Banville, remarked at his funeral on his importance as a man of letters: an appreciation of his significance as a poet was left to the future. That significance was uncovered by a new generation of

Symbolists, by Paul Verlaine and by a poet who is perhaps the most well known and imitated embodiment of satanic revolt, Arthur Rimbaud. Baudelaire, it is true, showed the way, but where he picked a few flowers of evil, Rimbaud spent an entire season in hell.

The legends surrounding Rimbaud are, as is often the case, better known than his work, and the most well known of these is the fact that he abandoned poetry and France at the age of nineteen and embarked on his own journey to the East. Or, more accurately, Africa, where he spent a decade trading in coffee and guns (it is also rumoured hashish), and amassing a considerable fortune. In 1891, at the age of thirty-six, he developed a tumour on his knee, and on his return to France, in Marseilles his right leg had to be amputated. The next months were spent in agony, cancer was diagnosed (but it may have been syphilis) and on 10 November 1891, Rimbaud, who had just turned thirty-seven, died. Not, however, before returning to the Church after a dramatic deathbed confession, or so his sister Isabelle claimed.

Other legends involve his tumultuous relationship with Paul Verlaine. The two sodomized, took drugs, drank heavily, wrote poetry, scandalized their peers, and, like any couple, had some vicious, nasty fights. During one of these Verlaine famously shot Rimbaud in the wrist, and spent some time in prison for it. These were the years of Rimbaud as the uncontrollable roaring boy, foul-mouthed, drunk on absinthe, dirty and dressed in rags, with his trademark pipe perched upside-down in his sneering lips. If this hooliganism was all Rimbaud accomplished, there would be little reason to remember him today. But he is responsible for taking the idea of the poet as a visionary, a seer, to previously unscaled heights and, perhaps even more so, hitherto unplumbed depths.

It is true that Isidore Ducasse, who wrote under the name Comte de Lautreamont, anticipated some of Rimbaud's discoveries and that his writing also displays a decided satanic character. Lautreamont's main work, Chants de Maldoror, is full of demonic energy, and reeks of sadism, perversity and dark, diabolical urges. Infanticide and cruel humiliating sex feature heavily, and although Ducasse died unknown at 24, when his work was re-discovered it understandably became a central inspiration for the Surrealists. But little is known of Lautreamont's life and it is unclear how much, if at all, he dabbled in the occult. This is not true of Rimbaud. Like Baudelaire and Nerval, with whom he has much in common, Rimbaud was a reader of works on mysticism, magic and alchemy. Hailed as a founding father of modernism, Rimbaud's poetic theories, which were to have a profound influence on 20th century literature, are rooted in his deep immersion in the popular occult writing of his time.

Rimbaud was born in Charleville, in the Ardennes region of northeastern France, in 1854. His father, an army captain, abandoned his family when Rimbaud was still a boy, and Arthur was raised by his stern, bigoted mother, a woman seemingly bereft of any conception of poetry. For a brilliant, sensitive and strong willed child, it was a classic formula for rebellion, but young Arthur, a child prodigy, was well behaved, a model pupil who astonished his teachers. Rimbaud read voraciously, and had a clear talent for Latin, winning first prize in a competition. Yet poetry became an early obsession, and at sixteen Rimbaud was writing brilliant pastiches of the Parnassians. His facility quickly led to criticism, and Rimbaud's poetry began to speak increasingly of a blasphemous revolt against the suffocating world of Charleville and the repressive embrace of his mother. Rimbaud ran away from home on more than one occasion, once to Paris to throw in his lot with the Commune of 1871. During this episode it's believed he had some shattering homosexual experience - possibly raped by soldiers - and it's after this that his rebellion became total. Along with drunkenness, unruliness, filth, violence and a taste for scatological expression, part of Rimbaud's revolt included a study of the occult.

Rimbaud was introduced to the occult by Charles Bretagne, a drinking companion from the cafes and bars of Charleville, where Rimbaud spent most of his time caging drinks and being more or less blasphemous. Bretagne was a customs official, amateur fiddler and draughtsman, who was also an habitual student of the Kabbalah.s Like Rimbaud, Bretagne was known for his outrageous opinions and behaviour. As Enid Starkie remarks, in the Middle Ages, Bretagne would probably have been burnt at the stake as a sorcerer.6 He encouraged Rimbaud's rebellion, arguing that vice was a means to enlarge the spirit, a belief shared by the ancient Gnostics. He also lent Rimbaud books on magic, alchemy and the Kabbalah. Given what was available in Charleville at the time, it's more than likely that what Rimbaud read were many of the works

discussed here. Rimbaud himself did not record what he read, but it is reasonable to assume that his list consisted of writers like Balzac, Baudelaire, Nerval, Saint-Martin, Cazotte, Hoene Wronski and Eliphas Levi. From Baudelaire alone Rimbaud would have absorbed the basic Swedenborgian idea of a higher spiritual world with which the physical world shares correspondences. That in itself would have been sufficient material for his own magical theory of poetry as `vision'.

Rimbaud's The'orie du Voyant was first set forth in two letters, written in May 1871, not long after his return from his catastrophic visit to Paris. Writing to his teacher George Izambard and a fellow poet, Paul Demeney, Rimbaud voiced his much repeated dictum that, "One must, I say, be a visionary, make oneself a visionary." The path to this, Rimbaud argued, led "through a long, prodigious and rational disordering of all the senses." The poet must face "ineffable torture;" he must possess "superhuman strength," be "the great criminal, the great sickman, the accursed and the supreme Savant!" And the goal of all his suffering is: "the unknown." Rimbaud's `disordering of the senses' would become standard for practically all aspiring poets to come, from the Symbolists to the Punks.

Rimbaud may have picked up the idea of the poet as visionary from Eliphas Levi. In Les Clefs des Grands Mysteres - a work later translated as The Keys of the Mysteries by Aleister Crowley - Levi wrote that the poets of the future are called on to "rewrite the divine comedy" according to the mathematics of God. This is a reference to the Pythagorean ideas of Levi's mentor Wronksi. The poet who accomplishes this, Levi claimed, would become co-creator with the deity. That poetry, language, was a means of achieving this is a fundamental belief of magic: according to the Kabbalah, if the secret name of God, the Tetragammaton, were spoken, the universe would be destroyed. Rimbaud believed such destruction was necessary before the new creation could begin. Hence his "rational disordering of all the senses."

Rimbaud's link between poetry and occultism is clear from the title of the collection of prose poems that embodies his Theorie du Voyant: Illuminations. Although there's a slight possibility the title is not Rimbaud's, his study of various occult illuminati, as well as the clear occult source for his Theorie du Voyant suggest otherwise. In any event, it is clear that in these works, Rimbaud is taking language into new, unexplored regions, into what he called "the unknown." Hence the difficulty many readers find on first encountering the work. Perhaps a less ambiguous expression of Rimbaud's occult poetics is in the poem Voyelles, "Vowels." Here Rimbaud expanded on Baudelaire's synesthesia, linking the vowels to particular colours: A black, E white, I red, U green, 0 blue, thus codifying the unity of sensation central to Symbolism. But as Enid Starkie argues, there is good reason to believe that Rimbaud based his alphabet on the sequence of colours associated with the alchemical process.'

Although Rimbaud was never a Satanist in the proper sense, he did recognize in the Devil the rebel par excellence. In the historian Jules Michel's writing on witchcraft, he would have found good arguments for seeing in Satan a figure of intelligence, creativity and will, whose worship the Church repressed in the Middle Ages. In Michelet's view, Satan is more a Prometheus figure, with echoes of Hermes Trismegistus, than a prince of darkness. Rimbaud, eager to cast off all inhibitions, would have found much encouragement in Michelet's argument.

Yet, after only two years of his "rational disordering of the senses," Rimbaud found himself at a dead end. The result was a merciless account taking, culminating in his harrowing A Season in Hell and the abandonment of poetry.

In his letter to George Izambard, Rimbaud wrote: "I is another." He repeated the phrase in his letter to Paul Demeny, adding that "The first study for a man who wants to be a poet is the knowledge of himself, entire." "He searches his soul, he inspects it, he tests it, he learns it." In order to do this, however, a certain distortion of the usual self must be accomplished. ". . . the soul has to be made monstrous," he told Demeny. "Imagine a man planting and cultivating warts on his face."

This warts and all plunge into self-analysis left Rimbaud revolted by his own revolt, and full of revulsion for his rebellion. A Season in Hell is Rimbaud's unflinching account of his alchemical descent into his own underworld, a fragmentation of his psyche into its disparate elements, the dissolutio in the first stage of the Great Work. After this, Rimbaud abandoned poetry, his homeland, and himself. "I" had become "another".8

J.K. Huysmans

If one book can claim to be a bible of decadence it has to be Huysmans' A Rebours. Translated as "Against Nature" or "Against the Grain," neither rendering really captures the essence of Huysmans title: as one literary critic suggests, "Up the Arsehole" is a more accurate and graphic attempt.9 In the character of des Esseintes, Huysmans took Baudelaire's brief fling as a dandy and combined it with the aesthetic predilections of other eccentrics - Ludwig II of Bavaria, Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, Edmond de Goncourt and, most famously, Robert, Comte de Montesquiou-Fezensac"' - and created an archetype of aristocratic world-rejection. In the "refined Thebaid" at Fontenay-aux-Roses, des Esseintes, a neurasthenic, oversensitive, weak and world-weary aesthete, shuts out the boring realities of everyday life and reconstructs his universe according to his over refined tastes. A jewelencrusted tortoise, voluptuous perfumes, exotic plants, an `organ of liqueurs' on which he performs oral concertos, a library of Latin decadent writers bound in rare Moroccan leather - Huysmans' DIY book on extravagant selfexpression became the blueprint of the fin de siecle. Arthur Symons famously called it "the breviary of the Decadence," and most readers know that it is the notorious "yellow backed book" that sent Dorian Gray on his exquisite road to perdition.

Yet, if not entirely accurate, "Against Nature" certainly expresses the basic philosophy of Huysmans and his Symbolist peers. From Swedenborg's belief that the external world is a symbol of a higher, spiritual one, we arrive at a complete rejection of Nature and the natural, and an enervating search for something else. In A Rebours that possible something else takes many forms: a glass case displaying silk stockings, a dining room fitted out like a ship's cabin, even the taste of moldy food found in the gutter. As may be expected, des Esseintes' attempts prove unsuccessful, and his need to escape a crushing, paralysing ennui is unabated. Barbey d'Aurevilly, reviewing A Rebours, remarked that its author would have to choose "between the muzzle of a pistol and the foot of the cross." Huysmans did end his life as an oblate in the Catholic Church. His road to salvation, however, led through some curious detours.

Doris-Karl Huysmans was born in Paris in 1848, the only child of a French mother and Dutch father and his early years were saddened by the early death of his father and his mother's subsequent remarriage. After finishing his education, at the age of eighteen, Huysmans entered government employment as a fonctionnaire, or civil servant, working with the Surete Generale. He remained there for thirty-two years. In 1874 Huysmans published his first book, a collection of prose poems, Le Drageoir a epices, which showed the influence of Baudelaire. Coming under the influence of Zola and the Medan Group, Huysmans turned to novel writing, and produced a series of competent, if unremarkable, works in the naturalist style of his mentor. But by 1882, Huysmans had become bored with Zola's sociological approach, and in a letter to his master complained that he felt the need "for a complete change."" The result was A Rebours which marked Huysmans' rejection of Zola and the start of his fascination with the strange, bizarre and artificial.

A Rebours, however, for all its rejection of Zola's methods, retains many of the naturalist school's practices. There is, for example, the prodigious research into a variety of subjects: botany, Latin literature, the Middle Ages, as well as the meticulous detail given to des Esseintes' diet, reading habits, style of dress, the decor of his rooms. Not much happens, and one often feels Huysmans enjoys communicating to his readers the extent of his scholarship. A similar experience greets the reader of La Bas. Like Zanoni, La Bas is full of fascinating information on Satanism, alchemy, the Middle Ages, Christian mysticism, herbology, astrology, black magic, Illuminism, and a host of other subjects. It's not unfair to see it as a kind of encyclopedia of fin de siecle occultism masquerading as a novel.

Exactly how Huysmans became interested in the occult is unclear, but it's likely that he came across occult works early on; as in the case of Rimbaud, occult ideas and references would be available in the popular writing of the time. Early signs of interest are apparent in his novel En Rade, where he speculates on incubi, succubi and the Kabbalah. Yet it was surely his dissatisfaction with crude "implacable life" that prompted his explorations. With des Esseintes' failure, Huysmans too was left still searching for that something else.

Communicating his despair at finding any satisfaction in life, Huysmans held out some hope for himself: "Perhaps there's still occultism," he offered. "I don't mean spiritualism, of course ... No, I mean genuine occultism ... there's a mystery there which appeals to me. I might even say it haunts me ...s12 Through the occult, Huysmans hoped to find "some compensation for the horror of daily life, the squalour of existence, the excremental filthiness of the loathsome age we live in.""

One portal to these mysteries was Edmond Bailly's bookshop in the rue de la Chausee d'Antin, home to the cream of Parisian occultists. Huysmans was introduced to the place by his friend, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. Here Huymans would encounter occultists like the morphine addicted Rosicrucian Stanislas de Guaita; Gerard Encausse, who wrote under the pseudonym of Papus, `Mysteriarch, Unknown Superior'; Paul Adam, member of the Supreme Council of the Rosy Cross; `Sar' Merodack Madan, an ex-bank clerk turned occult propagandist; and Edouard Dubus, a young poet who shared with de Guaita a taste for narcotics.14 Soon Huysmans found himself involved with the Naundorffists, supporters of the enigmatic King Charles XI, who claimed the throne that his father, Charles Edourad Naundorff, had made a bid for as Louis XVII. At first Huysmans gathered material on the Naundorff cause, thinking to write a novel around it. But soon he dropped that idea for one more powerful: the history of Gilles de Rais, the distinguished soldier and comrade of Joan of Arc who plunged into black magic and an orgy of sadism and cruelty. By the time he came to write Ld Bas, Huysmans' alter ego, Durtal, would split his time between researching Gilles de Rais' enormities, and throwing himself into more contemporary darkness.

Another occult influence on Huysmans, perhaps the most central, was Berthe Courriere, mistress of the writer Remy de Gourmont. Gourmont once described Berthe Courriere as "a kabbalist and occultist, learned in the history of asiatic religions and philosophies, fascinated by the veil of Isis, initiated by dangerous personal experiences into the most redoubtable mysteries of the Black Art ..."15 Berthe had made the rounds before becoming Gourmont's paramour, having been mistress and model for George Sand's nephew, the sculptor Clesinger. Yet others spoke less highly of her. Pierre Dufay described her as "a madwoman whose lucid intervals were not entirely free from the disordered notions which haunted her." According to Robert Baldick, Huysmans' biographer, her mind was "certainly unbalanced." Twice certified as insane and committed to a mental asylum, Berthe harboured an unwholesome passion for priests, and made a practice of shocking, or seducing, young confessors with an account of her unusual sexual practices. Along with distributing communion hosts to stray dogs, she decorated her flat with a disturbing blend of Catholic and satanic bric-a-brac, mixing altar-cloths, monstrances, and dalmatics with the work of Felicien Rops. Gourmont's portraits of Courriere in works like Le Fantome express her religio-sadistic eroticism: ". . . Hyacinthe appeared before me completely naked, begging me to flagellate her. She had in her hand the scourge of a canoness ... I obeyed her. Blood-red lines stigmatized the shoulders of my lover ..."16 Huysmans remained friends with Gourmont and Courriere for a few years, during which time he listened to Berthe's tales of occultism, and at least on one occasion, participated in a seance at their flat.

Huysmans' other dark angel was Henriette Maillat. Maillat and Huysmans had been lovers briefly - she had earlier been the paramour of the notorious `Sar' Madan, another Rosicrucian master - and in L i Bas, Huysmans used many of her love letters to him verbatim. When the novel was published, Henriette made a clumsy attempt to blackmail him. Where Berthe Courriere targeted men of the cloth, Henriette had a thing for writers, and after Peladan, she had bagged Leon Bloy before moving onto Huysmans. Between these two volatile and neurotic women, Huysmans created the figure of Mme. Chantelouve, Durtal's voluptuously wicked and diabolically desirable satanic seductress.

It was through Berthe Courriere that Huysmans would meet the defrocked priest Joseph Antoine Boullan, upon whom he would model Dr. Johannes, the master exorcist of the novel, enemy of all things diabolical. In actual fact, Boullan was an irredeemably nasty character, who, if we are to believe Stanislas de Guaita, advocated practices of wild promiscuity, adultery, bestiality, onanism, incubism, and incest: small wonder that Berthe Courriere knew him. According to Francis King, Boullan was guilty of even worse sins: with his mistress Adele Chevalier, a nun, Boullan is believed to have committed infanticide, possibly murdering one of their own children, as well as others, in satanic rites. The pair engaged in a particularly nauseating form of ritual, in which communion hosts mixed with excrement were employed. For all his encyclopedic research,

in the case of Boullan, even the most sympathetic reader must agree that Huysmans was clearly hoodwinked.

Canon Docre, the central villain of the novel, is thought to be based on a Belgian priest, the Abbe Van Haecke. According to Huysmans, at a Black Mass he attended, he noticed a priest dressed in a cassock and hood, observing the activities with deep interest. Soon after, he saw a photograph of the same priest in the window of a bookshop specializing in works on Satanism. It was Van Haecke. Huysmans gathered other evidence, including the reports of Berthe Courriere and the poet Edouard Dubus. Yet both Courriere and Dubus were unstable characters; and it was during a visit to Bruges, where Van Haecke supposedly held his satanic affairs, that Courriere was placed in a mental asylum: she was found practically naked hiding in the bushes on the Rempart des Marechaux. The police declined to accept her story that she had just barely escaped the clutches of the evil Van Haecke, who was known in his home town as a admirably devout and devoted priest. Given Huysmans' accuracy on Boullan, we should, I think, suspend judgement on Van Haecke. One picturesque bit of evidence that Huysmans uncovered, however, is worth mentioning: Van Haecke is supposed to have had crucifixes tattooed on the soles of his feet, so he could have the pleasure of continually walking on the symbol of salvation.

There is also some doubt if Huysmans ever attended a Black Mass, or if what he did attend was the genuine article. Whatever the case, his account of one in Ld Bas is gripping, and if not based on the real thing, it certainly tells us how one should be done. That Huysmans believed he had stepped into the dark zone is undeniable; soon after La Bas appeared, Huysmans found himself involved in a magical feud between Boullan and his arch enemy, Stanislas de Guaita, including evil spells, `fluidic fisticuffs' and more material dangers, like pistols at twenty paces. Even his cat was affected." It's understandable that after all he had been through, Huysmans may have felt quite relieved that "with his hooked paw," the Devil was drawing him toward God. After Ld Bas all that was left was the cross.

Valery Briusov

It's easy to get the impression that Paris was the only European capital harbouring satanic devotees. It wasn't. While London had its own quota of magical societies - most notably the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, out of whose bosom the most notorious magician of the 20th century, Aleister Crowley, would emerge - more exotic cities produced their own occult progeny. Nowhere did the occult craze reach wilder heights or more bizarre depths than in Russia's St. Petersburg. In the Silver Age of Russia (18901914), the city of White Nights, as well as its rival, Moscow, plunged into an apocalyptic orgy of esoterica, magic and erotic madness. It was out of Mother Russia that Madame Blavatsky, the formidable founder of theosophy, would journey to the west. Russia also produced the `mad monk' Grigori Rasputin, the enigmatic G.I. Gurdjieff, and his preeminent disciple P.D. Ouspensky, who we will meet in the next section.

In the years leading up to the Bolshevik Revolution, an eschatological fever spread throughout the Russian intelligentsia, a sense of which was captured by the novelist Hermann Hesse in a collection of essays, Glimpse into Chaos, which had a profound influence on T.S. Eliot, and which he refers to in the notes to "The Waste Land." In the novels of Dostoyevsky, Hesse encountered a powerfully antinomian soul, a dizzyingly paradoxical consciousness that could as easily express itself in the rapture of the saint as in the violence of the criminal. "Russian Man," Hesse argued, was the embodiment of an ancient, occult , asiatic ideal, a primal, archetypal consciousness that threatened to overwhelm the West as much as it held the promise of its vital renewal. "Russian Man" was a sinner and holy man, a criminal and a saint, an ascetic and profligate, an angel and a devil: anything but the lukewarm middle ground occupied by the safe and mediocre bourgeoisie. "Russian Man" is bent on "turning away from every fixed morality and ethic in favour of a universal understanding ... a new, dangerous, terrifying sanctity." He seeks to "perceive the divine, the necessary ... even in what is most wicked and ugly." In him "good and evil, outer and inner, God and Satan are cheek and jowl."'R

As in Paris, one aspect of the Russian mystical debauch was a fascination with evil, and with the variety of

gnostic mythologies that saw in the pursuit of vice a short cut to heaven. One strain of this was the kind of erotic saintliness associated with Rasputin. Another was an obsession with the figure of the Devil. Imported via French Symbolism, which reached the Russian steppes by the early 1890s, various forms of Satanism and satanic worship became the central obsession of a host of Russian poets, artists and musicians. Through drugs, wild dress, suicide clubs and other outre behaviour, a variety of diabolical themes fascinated the intelligentsia. Philosophers like Vladimir Soloviev and Nicolas Berdyaev, writers like Dmitry Merzhkovsky and Vasily Rozanov, poets like Zinaida Gippius and Aleksandr Blok, and artists like Mikhail Vrubel and Mstislav Dobuzhinsky all incorporated demonic and satanic themes into their work. The poet Konstantine Balmont published Evil Spell: A Book of Exorcisms, linking the darkness that followed the failed revolution of 1905 to the occult. The poet Ellis (Lev Kobylinskii) asked if Satan "was not better than a large part of the human race we try to save from him?" Satanic erotica became a familiar part of mainstream journalism, with images of passive, half naked women preyed upon by demonic incubi. On stage, the actor Fedor Chaliapin made a career portraying satanic figures, most famously Mephistopheles from Gounod's Faust. Nicolai Riabushinsky, who hosted a suicide club called the Black Swan, published an advertisement in his journal The Golden Fleece, asking for contributions for a special edition dedicated to the Devil: he received ninety-two replies. Some individuals carried the demonic craze to gruesome lengths: Scriabin, whose diabolical compositions include a Poeme satanique, a `Black Mass' (9th Sonata) and the Gargantuan Prometheus: Poem of Fire, remarked on the activities of the painter Nikolai Shperling, who, as part of an `occult exercise', ingested the flesh and blood of wounded or dead soldiers during WWI. What Shperling's digestion thought of this practice is unknown.19

Central to the Russian diabolical milieu was the poet, novelist and critic Valery Briusov. Briusov looked every inch the demonic genius, with his arching, Mongol eyebrows, perfect dress and black beard trimmed to a devilish point. A consummate literary careerist, Briusov was a cultural opportunist who started out as a decadent and aesthete, and ended his career as the head of the Literary Division of the Commissariat of Education. A true Symbolist, Briusov was determined that his life should imitate art and he saw the people around him solely as material for his work, a point we will return to shortly. Suicide, madness and drugs formed the backdrop to his rise. Along with producing some of the most finely chiselled Symbolist poetry, and at least one short masterpiece, the story "The Republic of the Southern Cross," Briusov is responsible for perhaps the most erotically charged occult novel of the 20th century, The Fiery Angel.20

Born in Moscow in 1873 to a family of prosperous cork merchants, by 1894, at the age of twenty, Briusov was already heralding himself as the leader of a new literary movement. In his diary for 4 March 1893 he wrote: "Talent, even genius, by honest means earns only gradual success ... For me that's not enough ... Decadence. Yes! ... the future belongs to it, especially when it finds a worthy leader. And that leader will be I!i21 Driven to carve a literary name for himself, Briusov fulfilled his dream rapidly. Influenced by Poe, Baudelaire and Huysmans, in 1894 and 1895 Briusov. published three slim volumes of Russian Symbolists. Although quickly ridiculed by Vladimir Soloviev, Briusov's translations of Verlaine, Maeterlinck, Mallarme, and Poe, as well as his own contributions, established him as the central authority on the new Russian literature. From then until 1912, the year that saw the beginning of his decline, Briusov reigned as the magus of Russian decadence. As well as his Mephistophelian appearance, Briusov's tactics included well-calculated social effects. Entrances and exits from literary fetes were carefully timed. With his domineering personality, Briusov quickly gathered a coterie of obsequious followers. His relations with other poets were that of teacher and student, even when the other poets were of equal, or greater stature. Friends who rejected such arrangements were quickly branded enemies. With his strong position as editor of the literary journal The Balance and association with the publishing house Scorpion, Briusov was 22 not an enemy many wanted to have.

Acutely conscious, reserved, and highly disciplined, Briusov was attracted to more ecstatic types, as well as to expedients like drugs, magic and eroticism, to stimulate his inspiration. One source was the precocious Aleksandr Dobroliubuv, a seventeen year old poet who was thrown out of high school for preaching suicide. A devotee of Poe and Baudelaire, Dobroliubov wore only black, smoked opium, and lived in a small windowless room, whose black walls were adorned with satanic bric-a-brac. Like Rimbaud, after plumbing the decadent depths, Dobroliubov abandoned poetry and started a religious sect. He was known to travel

throughout Russia encased in iron hoops. According to Nicolas Berdyaev, his followers had the peculiar habit of not responding to a question until a year had passed. As Berdyaev points out, this made conversation inconvenient.23

Konstantine Balmont was another source for Briusov, and with Andrei Bely, who we will meet further on, Briusov carried on something of an occult feud. A follower of Rudolf Steiner, Bely came under Briusov's influence but soon asserted his own creative identity. A greater writer, though a more labile personality, Bely felt himself the subject of an "extremely suspicious psychological experiment": he believed Briusov was trying to hypnotize him. A kind of magical war flared up between them, mostly in print, with Briusov happily accepting the persona of the dark sorcerer. Yet Bely was not without resources, and in a dream duel, Briusov felt himself pierced by a sword in Bely's hand. He awoke with a pain in his heart.

This magical rivalry forms the basis of Briusov's medieval occult psychodrama, The Fiery Angel. Like Ld Bas and Zanoni, The Fiery Angel is encyclopedic; Briusov was nothing if not thorough and he studied the literature diligently. Faust, Mephistopheles, Cornelius Agrippa, the Inquisition, demonology and other magical themes all make appearances. Briusov's recreation of the medieval occult milieu is flawless. But the plot, centred around the sado-erotic obsession of the hysterical Renata with Madiel, the fiery angel, comes straight out of Briusov's life, and is based on an erotic triangle between himself, Bely and a young poet named Nina Petrovskaya. Nina Petrovskaya was a nineteen year old minor poet married to the publicist Sergei Sokolov. She had fallen in love with Bely, but lost him to the wife of the poet Aleksandr Blok. She turned to Briusov for help; it's said they practised magical rituals in order to renew Bely's affections for her. This failed and out of revenge, Nina became Briusov's lover. Of Briusov, Nina wrote that he offered a "chalice of dark, astringent wine ... and said, `Drink'." She did. For the next seven years, during which time Briusov maintained a curious bourgeois double life with his wife Joanna, they engaged in a sadomasochistic affair fuelled by drugs, madness and suicide pacts. In her memoirs Petrovskaya speaks of Briusov as a master of the "dark sciences," and of their relationship as a "pact with the Devil." Together they were "children of evil."

In the novel Nina is Renata, possessed by demons, Briusov the knight Ruprecht, obsessed with Nina, and Bely the satanic Madiel, the fiery angel. In the novel Ruprecht/Briusov agrees to attend a Black Mass in order to help Nina find Madiel. Though more of a witches' coven, it is as gripping a tour de force as Huysmans' Ld Bas. Life, however, imitates art, and having written the novel, Briusov lost interest in Nina and callously dropped her. Crushed, she left Moscow and later committed suicide. She was not the only one. After Nina Briusov became involved with another unstable poet, Nadechda Lvova, whose lyrics show a preoccupation with death. The poet V.F. Khodasevich claims that Briusov encouraged her suicidal inclinations, even presenting her with a pistol that Nina Petrovskaya had once turned on Briusov himself. After he ended their affair she shot herself with it. Another poet, the twenty-one year old Viktor Gofman apparently took Briusov's advice on this matter as well.

Death held an attraction for Briusov; several of his early poems deal with necrophilia, and focus on the premature death of his first lover - she died at twenty-four of consumption - a theme that would continue to fascinate him. His interest in the occult may have been, like so much else, a calculated pose. But it attracted him early on; in the early 1890s he was already holding seances in, of all places, a notary's office. But it was the promise of power, more than anything else, that lured him to the dark side. At the end of his life, solitary, suffering and addicted to morphine - when Khodasevich heard of his death in 1924, he was surprised he hadn't already committed suicide - Briusov may have regretted typecasting himself so perfectly as the satanic master.

Notes

1 As mentioned, Rudolf Steiner adopted Ahriman as one of the spiritual entities interfering with human evolution; the other he named Lucifer. Ahriman is the embodiment of cold, factual, materialist thought. Following Milton, in Lucifer Steiner sees the archetype of impulsive, rash, overweening arrogance.

2 Francis King, article on Satanism in Encyclopedia of the Unexplained, editor Richard Cavendish (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974) p. 219.

3 That a similar form of `reversal' was a common practice in earlier times is well documented; one thinks of the ancient Saturnalia, when slaves were made kings and virgins prostitutes. One also thinks of the Greek practice of enduring some selfinflicting suffering to offset a piece of good luck, as a kind of inoculation against the jealousy of the gods. The basic mechanism is a kind of regulatory process, whereby a desirable mean between good and evil, yang and yin, is maintained. In the 1960s, student radicals employed a strategy of `reversal' against the `establishment' that is strikingly similar to that used in the Black Mass. See my Turn Off Your Mind: The Mystic Sixties and the Dark Side of the Age of Aquarius (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 2001).

4 An altogether more satanic character, the notorious Aleister Crowley, engaged in very similar activities, filing his canines and subjecting female acquaintances to his `serpent's kiss' and, at least on one occasion, hanging his current Scarlet Woman upside down from a ceiling.

5 He also knew Verlaine, and it was Bretagne who suggested to Rimbaud that he send the older poet copies of his poems.

6 Enid Starkie Arthur Rimbaud (London: Faber and Faber, 1961) p. 98.

7 Ibid. pp. 165-167.

8 The parallel's with Lautreamont are worth mentioning. Poesie, written after Maldoror, is Lautreamont's complete rejection of his earlier, `satanic' work.

9 Colin Wilson The Books in My Life (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 1998) p. 240

10 He also served as a model for Proust's Charlus in A Remembrance of Things Past.

11 Quoted in Robert Baldick The Life of j..K. Huysmans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955) p. 77.

12 Ibid. p. 141.

13 Ibid. p. 140.

14 Both de Guaita and Dubus would die of overdoses. De Guaita died in 1897, at the age of 36; in his last years his life sunk into unrelieved decadence, and he emerged from his scarlet and black apartments only to search for books on occultism, and drugs. In 1895, Dubus was found dead in the urinal of a restaurant in the Place Maubert. He had been released from an insane asylum a few months earlier. A few days before his death, he had complained to Huysmans about voices that pursued him, and confessed to having practised black magic.

15 Quoted in Christopher McIntosh, Eliphas Levi and the French Occult Revival (London: Rider, 1972) p. 178. Baldick, p. 138.

16 Quoted in Remy de Gourmont, The Angels of Perversity, tr. Francis Amery (Sawtry: Dedalus, 1992) pp. 170-171.

17 The entire story can be found in Baldick and in McIntosh. McIntosh also provides fascinating material on De Guaita's and Peladan's brief collaboration in the Cabalistic Order of the Rosy Cross, before splitting up into rival Rosicrucian groups. Neither Peladan nor de Guaita had any connection to the 17th Century Rosicrucians, other than name. Peladan had a brief celebrity as the host of a series of Rosicrucian salons, which aimed to unite mysticism and art. Some of the people involved were Erik Satie, Gustave Moreau, and Puvis de Chavannes.

18 Hermann Hesse "The Brothers Karamazov or The Decline of Europe" in My Belief (London:Jonathan Cape, 1976) pp. 71-73.

19 For a full account of the satanic world of the Russian fin de siecle see Kristi A Groberg's essay "The

Shade of Lucifer's Dark Wing: Satanism in Silver Age Russia," in The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture, Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal ed., (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997) pp. 99-133.

20 Prokofief based his 1919 opera of the same name on Briusov's novel, adding his own contribution to a late flare of Russian occultism.

21 The Diary of Valery Briusov edited and translated by Joan Delaney Grossman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) p. 36.

22 Both The Balance and Scorpion have clear astrological associations: Libra and Scorpio, signs of the pervasive occult atmosphere of the time.

23 Nicholas Berdyaev Dream and Reality (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1950) p. 200.

Fin de siecle Occultism

The twenty-four years between 1890 and the beginning of World War I saw a remarkable eruption of creative energy and speculation, a fantastic melange of alternative and progressive ideas wedding ancient beliefs and modern science. Central to this ideological flood was the occult, the elements of which reached from the dim, primeval past to the unimagined future. Notions of prehistoric lost civilizations and evolutionary supermen shared the same intellectual space as a profound rediscovery of magic and a dizzying preoccupation with higher dimensions. As in some aspects of current New Age philosophy, science and mysticism were seen to support each other, with Einstein's theory of relativity and ideas about `non-Euclidean space' bolstering accounts of astral travel and visions of the Akashic Record. Philosophy, too, was conscripted, and Nietzsche's prophecy of the Ubermensch blended with eastern ideas of karma and reincarnation. A deep dissatisfaction with the mechanical picture of the universe professed by rationalist science primed western consciousness for a cultural journey to the east, and an influx of oriental philosophies invaded Europe, the results of which we still see today. In fact many of the preoccupations that we associate with New Age thought have their roots in the turn of the 19th century. Yoga, meditation, vegetarianism; multiculturalism, homeopathy, and higher consciousness; visions of an alternative society, anticapitalism, and interest in primitive beliefs; a fascination with ancient stone monuments, religious cults, and communes; progressive education, free love, feminism and openness to homosexuality and lesbianism; experimentation with drugs, a rejection of cold reason in favour of feeling and intuition, paganism and nature worship; a turning away from modernity and progress as well as a feverish millennialism: in the years leading up to World War I these and other ingredients com bined to produce an effervescent, highly charged atmosphere in which anything seemed possible and in which the new century just dawning seemed a blank slate on which mankind could now write its own destiny.

Like today, much of this optimism took place on the lunatic fringe, and books like James Webb's The Occult Underground, which charts the history of a variety of occult, mystical and in some way alternative societies at the turn of the 19th century, are an entertaining and sobering read. But a good deal of this activity had firmer foundations and found its way into some of the most intelligent minds of the time, influencing the literature, art, and social theory of the era. In the concluding essay "The Modernist Occultist" I will touch on some of the results of this influence.

Probably the most immediate name to come to mind associated with the occult revival of the late 19th century is W.B. Yeats. Yeats was drawn to the occult early on and was a member of two of the most celebrated magical organizations of modern times: the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, both of which we will hear more of shortly. But poets were not the only individuals drawn to the dark side of the mind. The psychologist and philosopher William James was deeply interested in the phenomenology of mystical experience, so much so that he sought some first hand evidence, experimenting with both nitrous oxide and peyote. One result of this was his classic The Varieties of Religious Experience, which argued for the validity and importance of supernatural experience, over the uniform strictures of dogma. James was also profoundly drawn to a study of the paranormal, being at one time a president of the Society for Psychical Research, a position he shared with his friend and fellow philosopher Henri Bergson. Bergson, too, was a student of the non-rational areas of consciousness, and along with studies of telepathy and other paranormal abilities he wrote on dreams, mysticism, and altered states of consciousness. Bergson was also one of the first philosophers to draw on the new advances in biology and to argue against the mechanistic vision of positivist science. In books like Time and Free Will (1889) and Matter and Memory (1896) Bergson advanced the idea that reason and the intellect were evolutionary tools developed by the mind in order to deal with the necessities of survival. To be effective they must falsify reality and present as a static, solid world of material things what is really a ceaseless flow of experience. A truer, deeper rapport with reality, Bergson argued, can be achieved only through our intuition, something the Romantics had claimed a century earlier. One writer profoundly influenced by Bergson's ideas was Marcel Proust, whose Remembrance of Things Past is an extended essay in Bergson's duration.

In Creative Evolution (1907) Bergson developed these ideas and argued against the by-then triumphant Darwinian picture of a mechanistic evolution, propelled by chance mutation and the blind will to survive,

offering instead an eloquent and persuasive vision of an elan vital, a transcendent `life force' which penetrates matter and moulds it to its end. That end, Bergson argued, was a kind of evolutionary spirituality. As he wrote in his last book, Two Sources of Morality and Religion (1932) - written well after his celebrity had dimmed - the universe, it seemed, was "a machine for making gods." One writer who agreed with Bergson was the playwright George Bernard Shaw, who, in his philosophical comedy Man and Superman (1904) (which includes a satanic dream episode, the brilliant Don Juan in Hell), combined Bergson's elan vital with Nietzsche's Ubermensch. Later, Shaw drew on Bergson's ideas again for his futurist fantasy Back to Methuselah (1924), which introduces a race of supermen living in some unthinkable future, semi-divine human beings who have transcended the earthly lot and occupy themselves solely with the eternal. Critics like D.H. Lawrence thought Shaw's Ancients a dismal bore, having given up the flesh for a life of pure mind, an accusation often made against Shaw himself. Most people agreed. But Shaw's vision of a coming super race had it roots in more than his own supposed lack of interest in the delights of corporality.

Although Bergson became the most well-known opponent of strict Darwinian thought, he was not the first. That honour most go to the author of a book published in 1877, decades before Creative Evolution. The author of the book, Isis Unveiled, a 1,300 page compendium of occult thought, mysticism, and weird speculation was an unusual critic of biological theory in more ways than one. In the first place, she was a woman; in the second, she was Russian. In the third place Helena Petrovna Blavatsky had led an unconventional life, having, among other things, founded what would quickly become a worldwide religious cult, theosophy. The stamp of theosophy falls across practically every aspect of fin de siecle occultism. This is true whether or not the occultists in question were ever theosophists in a strict sense. Along with ideas of hidden masters, reincarnation and cosmic evolution, what theosophy brought to occultism was the belief that it and science were not enemies, but complementary approaches to uncovering the secrets of the universe. There had been earlier exponents of this idea: Mesmer, for one, and later both Poe and BulwerLytton argued that occult phenomena were really the result of forces not yet understood by science. Goethe believed that his own scientific work in botany, morphology and optics was as important as his poetry, an opinion not shared by many. One occultist who did agree with Goethe, however, was Rudolf Steiner, a Goethe scholar, philosopher and theosophist who broke away from theosophy and inaugurated his own form of "spiritual science", anthroposophy, arguably the most successful school of alternative thought to emerge from the 20th century. Needless to say, for the alchemists of an earlier time, occultism itself was a branch of science, perhaps the most important one.

Yet, while a sense of optimism and expectation greeted the new century, darker visions were also present. Along with intimations of a leap in human evolution, atavistic forces and primal ancient energies also rose to the surface. We have seen some evidence for this in the previous section, in the rise of Satanism and witchcraft. But the shadow took other forms as well. The chasm between the two worlds widened, and the Symbolist rejection of the "mundane shell" (Blake's phrase) reached its peaked. No longer content to ignore the modern world, the late-Romantic consciousness now heaped contempt upon it, and sought refuge in visions of some glittering golden past, or found itself alone in an abyss of cosmic isolation. A sense of apocalypse pervaded the psyche, appearing in some as the approach of madness, in others as the trumpet call of the last days. In a few cases, the two were synonymous. By the summer of 1914, darkness fell, and old Europe was no more.

Madame Blavatsky

As noted earlier, 1875 was an important year for occultism. It saw the death of Eliphas Levi and the birth of Aleister Crowley, two significant events by any standard. But even more significant, it was in that year that three eccentric individuals founded an organization that would profoundly influence not only modern occultism, but modern culture in general. In New York .City on 13 September 1875, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott and William Quan Judge came together to form a successor to their previous occult organization, `the Miracle Club', as one member had ironically referred to it. In its first stages the Theosophical Society was an outgrowth of the popular occultism of the time, and included

among its founding members a spirit medium, a kabbalist, and other characters familiar with the traditions of European occultism. The last few decades had seen an obsession with spiritualism on both sides of the Atlantic. It began in upstate New York with the famous Fox sisters in 1848; by the early 1870s, Madame Blavatsky herself had acquired a considerable reputation as a medium. It was in this capacity that she met the earnest and soon-to-be devoted Colonel Olcott. A reporter with a deep interest in the supernatural, Olcott had heard of a pair of remarkable spirit mediums, the Eddys, who lived on a farm in Vermont. Arriving there he was immediately captivated by the appearance of an even more remarkable figure, Madame Blavatsky. Although it was her red Garibaldi shirt, forthright manner, ample proportions and powerful charisma that first caught his attention, Olcott soon discovered that Blavatsky was endowed with psychic abilities that easily outstripped those of the mediums he intended to investigate. A lifetime association began, and soon after the two became Platonic flat mates in Manhattan.

Soon after its inception, the vague interest in latent powers and occult phenomena that characterized the early Theosophical Society was complicated by a host of eastern metaphysical ideas brought in by Olcott and Blavatsky. The term "theosophy" itself had been around for centuries, Jacob Boehme makes much use of it, and literally means `God wisdom'. But since the founding of the Theosophical Society, the term has been synonymous with the kind of generic eastern spirituality and occultism associated with the group. Yet if all the Theosophical Society had going for it was the hodgepodge of mystical ideas loosely knitted together into its philosophy, it would never have had the kind of influence on 20th century thought it undoubtedly did. At the centre of the mass of doctrines about reincarnation, past lives, astral planes, higher consciousness and spiritual evolution was the formidable, electric and roguish figure of Madame Blavatsky. It is true that the world was waiting for something like theosophy to arrive. Bereft of God through the rise of science, and flooded with a triumphant materialist doctrine, thousands of individuals who sought spiritual guidance found themselves adrift in an indifferent universe. With its broad message of universal brotherhood, spiritual truth and cosmic mysteries, theosophy appealed to both the devout ascetic and the late-Romantic. Yet it's difficult to see how its message would have got across without the captivating personality of its spokeswoman.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (or HPB, as her followers called her), was born Helena von Hahn in 1831 in Ekaterinoslav in the Ukraine. Like her fellow Russian G.I. Gurdjieff, Blavatsky's early life is shrouded in mystery. She was married at eighteen to Nikifor Blavatsky, the Vice-Governor of the province of Erivan, but the marriage was never consummated. Indeed, it is doubtful whether HPB ever had sex, or if she had, that the experience was at all pleasant. All of her remarks on it are disparaging, and she constantly advised her followers to abstain from the beastly business, considering carnal activity a major impediment to the spiritual path. Leaving her husband, Blavatsky went to Constantinople, where she worked as a bareback rider in a circus; here she is supposed to have sustained an injury that made sex in any case impossible, prompting the thought that her abstemious virtue was founded on necessity. For a time she worked as the assistant of the medium Daniel Dunglas Home; later she directed the Serbian Royal Choir. She owned an artificial flower factory, worked as a journalist, short story writer and piano teacher, and was one of the few survivors of the wreck of the Eumonia. Finding herself stranded in Cairo, she conducted bogus seances, aided by large helpings of hashish, a taste for which she maintained throughout her life.

Before turning up in New York, HPB is alleged to have travelled extensively in Tibet, a remarkable claim at the time, and doubly so for a woman, one matched only by the equally redoubtable Alexandra David Neel, author of the occult classic Magic and Mystery in Tibet. Tibet and its remote fastness became in Blavatsky's mind a central symbol and source of spiritual truth and wisdom. Earlier in her career this position was occupied by Egypt. Perhaps Egypt was too close, or maybe there was little left of it that had not been explored; possibly the hidden masters - with whom she claimed to be in constant communication - wanted a change of scenery. Whatever the reason, by the time the theosophical ball really got rolling, all roads, paths and ways led to the remote Himalayan peaks. This journey to the east reached the popular mind in hundreds of ways, among others novels like James Hilton's Lost Horizon, made into a 1937 film starring Ronald Coleman, and W. Somerset Maugham's The Razor's Edge, which was also made into a film, in 1946, starring Tyrone Power and Gene Tierney.'

Blavatsky and Olcott drew followers from the occult demimonde of late 19th century New York, but it wasn't long before the popularity of spiritualism began to fade. The public mind had tired of it, and in any case Blavatsky herself was bored with the business. Her calling lay elsewhere. It wasn't the message of the spirits that she was destined to proclaim, but the hidden wisdom of the ages. Lost for centuries, obscured by the false doctrines of materialism and an incomplete science, it was revealed to her in copious detail by an incontrovertible source. These were the hidden masters, adepts who guide the evolution of humankind from secret monasteries in the Himalayas. They had chosen her as their spokeswoman to bring their teachings to the masses, in order to prevent the modern world from sinking deeper into the spiritless doctrines of matter. Proof of this came in the form of the famous Mahatma letters, which Blavatsky would materialize out of thin air, to the amazement of Colonel Olcott. Part of the message the masters delivered was that Olcott should abandon his wife and children and devote himself completely to the cause, which he promptly did.

The Colonel was impressed by HPB's abilities, but the public at large required something more. Blavatsky obliged with Isis Unveiled, a massive tome which covered everything from magic and psychic powers to ancient races, secret teachings, and Hindu philosophy. Its basic premise was that the occult is not hocus-pocus but a true science, based on profound knowledge of the secrets of nature, lost to modern humanity but known to the ancients and to a few highly evolved human beings, the adepts. It also presented an outline of cosmic and human evolution vastly different than that offered by modern science. A first printing of 1,000 copies sold out in ten days and a review in the New York Herald called it "one of the most remarkable productions of the century." A decade later, Blavatsky followed up with an even larger tome, The Secret Doctrine, more or less the Old Testament of modern occultism. Along with ransacking her library of occult works - and chain smoking hashish - Blavatsky's writing habits included perusing the Akashic Record to verify her many citations. Olcott describes how mid-paragraph HPB would stare into the middle distance for a few moments, then hurriedly put pen to paper. She was, he said, consulting the astral light for the correct page references.

Astral light was one of Eliphas Levi's contributions, arguing that it was the medium of the magician's will and imagination, thus uniting Mesmer's ideas with those of Romanticism. Another was the notion of an unbroken chain of occult inheritance, the handing down of dark secrets and forbidden knowledge from adept to apprentice. Both ideas would profoundly influence Blavatsky. Another influence was the Frenchman Louis Jacolliot. In books like Occult Science in India (1875) Jacolliot argued that a society of unknown men actually did exist in India whose influence on world events was paramount. In the 1920s the legend of the `Nine Unknown' turn up in the esoteric fiction of the novelist Talbolt Mundy, himself a member of Katharine Tingley's Point Loma Theosophical Society, and in the 1960s they formed part of Louis Pauwel's and Jacques Bergier's The Morning of the Magicians (1960). But the occult writer who had the most influence on Blavatsky was Bulwer-Lytton. From Zanoni, along with other occult notions, Blavatsky appropriated the idea of a group of ageless occult masters who stood apart from the mass of humanity. She also borrowed the idea of an ancient, secret language, which she called Senzar, the original tongue of the Book of Dzyan, whose teachings form the basis of The Secret Doctrine. And from Lytton's early science fiction work The Coming Race, she took the notion of a new race of super beings, which would eventually supplant humanity. The idea that man was evolving into a new kind of being would become popular in a variety of ways in the new century - Nietzsche, Bergson, H.G. Wells and Bernard Shaw 2 all produced versions of it. But Bulwer Lytton was first, and after him Blavatsky. Blavatsky's ideas of cosmic evolution involving unimaginably vast epochs would find their way into the weird fantasies of H.P. Lovecraft and the science fiction epics of Olaf Stapledon3, but unfortunately for many they formed the basis of a spiritually correct form of racism, most virulently in the hands of proto-Nazi Aryan supremacists.

After New York, Blavatsky and Olcott moved to India and based themselves in Adyar. From there they proceeded to conquer the occult world with their inviting blend of spiritual phenomena and eastern teaching. In 1884 Blavatsky travelled to England, where interest in theosophy had been piqued by the publication of A.P. Sinnett's books Esoteric Buddhism and The Occult World. Yet not long after disaster struck: an ex-employee published articles describing how HPB faked spiritual phenomena, most significantly the appearance of the masters Koot Hoomi and Morya. An investigation by the Society for Psychical Research concurred, and the integrity of theosophy was shaken. Yet both incidents had little longterm effect on the

growth of the movement, which continued to attract followers in Europe and America, claiming, among others, Thomas Edison, Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, and Abner Doubleday, the inventor of baseball. Blavatsky spent her last days in Europe, writing the monumental Secret Doctrine, surrounded by devoted followers. She died in 1891 of Bright's disease.

Villiers de l'Isle-Adam II

On 26 February 1894, W B. Yeats attended a performance of Villiers de l'Isle Adam's philosophical drama Axel at the Theatre de la Gaite in Paris. Of the performance Yeats wrote that "Count Villiers de l'Isle-Adam swept together ... words behind which glimmered a spiritual and passionate mood ..." and created characters who exhibited "a pride like that of the Magi following their star ..." That Yeats should be so enthusiastic about a play performed in a language he was less than fluent in might raise an eyebrow, were it not for the fact that mystery and suggestion, not explicit meaning, were well in keeping with the essence of Villiers' Symbolist epic. Even before seeing the performance, Yeats had laboured over Villiers' play, scrutinizing it "as learned men read newlydiscovered Babylonian cylinders" and admitting that the work "seemed all the more profound, all the more beautiful, because I was never quite certain that I had read a page correctly." It was not, he admitted, a great masterpiece, but to the hermetically minded Yeats, Axel "seemed part of a religious rite, the ceremony perhaps of some secret Order ..."4

Yeats himself knew of such secret orders. In his teens in Dublin he had discovered theosophy, and in 1885 he met the Indian theosophist Mohini Chatterji, who introduced him to the Bhagavad Gita and Hindu philosophy and prompted his joining the society. In 1887, after moving to London, and visiting Madame Blavatsky, Yeats drifted from eastern wisdom to western esotericism, leaving the Theosophical Society in 1890 and joining the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the most famous magical club of the fin de siecle. It's an understatement that a complete understanding of Yeats' poetry can be had only by grasping the importance of the occult in his life, a significance too often ignored by literary critics and academics. His host for his stay in Paris was MacGregor Mathers, the magician, kabbalist and head of the Golden Dawn during Yeats involvement. He too was impressed by Axel, as was Villiers' fellow writer Sar Peladan, the renegade Rosicrucian whose magical salon included figures like Erik Satie and Odilon Redon and who fought an occult duel with the dark magician, Stanislas de Guaita (see Huysmans and Ld Bas). "Villiers de l'Isle-Adam," wrote Remy de Gourmont," has opened the doors of the unknown with a crash, and a generation has gone through them to the Infinite." Sadly, Villiers himself was not around to appreciate his success, but it's almost appropriate that he would have already passed into the very Unknown that his doomed alter ego, Axel, anticipates with such ardour. A measure of the accuracy with which Villiers portrayed the spirit of the age can be seen in the fact that the literary' critic Edmund Wilson entitled his influential study of the "imaginative literature of 1870-1930", taking in such heavyweights as Proust, Joyce, Eliot and Yeats himself, Axel's Castle. The shadow of that mystic tower fell upon the consciousness of two generations.

The plot of Axel, insofar as it has one, centres around a buried treasure. As mentioned earlier, this is a symbol of alchemical gold and esoteric wisdom, but it is also an emblem of the lost wealth of Villiers' family. Count Axel of Auersburg, a young, handsome but world weary nobleman, has retired to his ancient family castle in the Black Forest. During the Napoleonic Wars, his father had hidden a fabulous horde of gold and jewels in the castle and was murdered by plotters planning to steal the treasure. Axel studies alchemy and hermetic philosophy, and is being prepared for initiation by a Rosicrucian adept, Master Janus. Axel's cousin, the vulgar Commander Kaspar, has got wind of the treasure and arrives at the castle. Axel's sedentary and contemplative existence disgusts him, and he tries to seduce Axel back into "life" with stories of battle and erotic conquest. Axel politely rejects these blandishments, but when Kaspar suggests that Axel finds the treasure, the young initiate challenges him to a duel and promptly kills him. While this is going on, Sara, a beautiful young noblewoman who has been put into a convent, finds a book that once belonged to Axel's dead mother. In it the secret of the treasure is revealed. Sara quickly escapes from the sisters and heads for the Black Forest. Arriving at the castle, Axel nobly offers her a chaste bed for the

night. When everyone is asleep, Sara descends to the family crypt and finds the secret button hidden within an heraldic death's-head. Gold and jewels gush forth. Axel, however, has discovered her as well, and Sara, a determined young woman, turns on him with two pistols. She wounds Axel, and in the ensuing struggle, they discover they are in love. Sara, as it turns out, is a Rosicrucian as well.

The rest of the drama is a long, poetic and densely purple dialogue in which the world-rejecting Axel convinces Sara that the only true union for them is in death. Sara, more robust than Axel, suggests at least one night of passion. But the initiate is not swayed, and although young, rich, beautiful and well positioned socially - not to mentioned possessed of powerful magical support - they end it all by drinking a goblet of poison.

Although Yeats and his mystic brethren were entranced by the play, the general public and the critics would have nothing of it. Yeats remarks that as Master Janus denounced the life of pleasure and advocated the pursuit of the virtuous and chaste, one "fat old critic ... turned around with his back to the stage and looked at the pretty girls through his opera glass." With all this talk of spirit and the soul, the younger generation, it seemed, were becoming morbid. Understandably, Axel did not have a long run.

Axel's renunciation of life is the logical fulfilment of the Romantic belief in the supremacy of the imagination, the final severing of Hoffmann's `serapiontic principle'. It is the end of the other path that Huysmans, Baudelaire and the rest might have taken, the one leading to the barrel of a pistol. In his own life Villiers, an ardent Catholic, found his way to the foot of the cross, and later tried to change the play's ending, to deflect Axel's nihilism into a Christian channel. Sadly, he did not have time: the stomach cancer diagnosed in 1889 prevented him and the thought that he would die before perfecting his life work ironically reinforced his original pessimism. It is said that on his death bed he was arranging a law suit against God. The spiritual purity that Axel sought would eventually lead to a kind of aesthetic paralysis, bringing the Symbolist project to Mallarme's blank page and, later, to the white canvases of Kasimir Malevich. It would also lead to its opposite, the decadent plunge into debilitating excess, and a helpless disgust with a world oblivious to Villiers' and others' attempts to transform it.

H.G. Wells

H.G. Wells was not an occultist. The high-priest of science, Wells once took his fellow Fabian Bernard Shaw to task for believing in Bergson's elan vital or `life force', calling it a juju' and relegating it to the heap of superstitions that modern man must jettison on his way to creating a rational world order. Yet Wells himself had his own version of a higher man, and throughout his career he frequently wedded Nietzsche's vision of a sudden evolutionary leap to the Victorian belief in progress through science. In his novel The Food of the Gods (1904), two biologists discover a food that promotes steady and unlimited growth. The people who eat it become giants, not only in size but in vision, leaving behind the "littleness, bestiality and infirmity of men." Inevitably, the giants cause fear in the little people, who try to destroy them. "We fight not for ourselves," the leader of the giants declares, "but for growth, growth that goes on forever ... To grow at last into the fellowship and understanding of God . Till the earth is no more than a footstool ... i5

To point out the fascist and capitalist overtones of this declamation is only too easy for us who have gone through the century that Wells was only entering, but to give Wells his due, neither of these ideologies was on his mind. This notion of an evolutionary elite - not too distant from Blavatsky's vision of an inner circle of spiritual masters - never left Wells, and it's perhaps understandable that a person of his talent and energy would grow impatient with muddling humanity. In perhaps the last of his great science fiction novels, In The Days of the Comet (1908), a gas from a passing comet transforms the inhabitants of England into nobler, finer beings; and as late as 1937, in his little known novella Star Begotten, Wells has Martians firing cosmic rays at Earth in order to produce a super race. Yet this evolutionary optimism was countered by a dark pessimism, rooted in 19th century science, with its vision of a mindless evolutionary process and coming "heat death" of the universe. The Time Machine (1895), The Island of Doctor Moreau (1896), The Invisible Man (1897), The War of the Worlds (1898) all project a dark future for mankind. And if we are to judge by

his last works, the darkness finally won. In Mind at the End of Its Tether (1945), his last book, Wells declared gloomily that "this world is at the end of its tether ... the end of everything we call life is close at hand ..." Entropy - in the form of the atom bomb - was hurling mankind toward extinction; the very science that had promised humanity a glorious future was making certain its unavoidable end.

Although Wells can't be called an occultist, in the early days of his career, when, following Poe, Bulwer-Lytton and Jules Verne, he was creating modern science fiction, Wells wrote in a milieu swimming in occult ideas. One that struck him particularly was "the fourth dimension." Along with The Time Machine, Wells used the idea of some other space parallel to our own frequently. In "The Plattner Story" (1896), an inept chemistry teacher causes an explosion and is transported into another world which, in keeping with the times, turns out to be the fourth dimension. After a nine-day sojourn in the spirit world, complete with the souls of the dead, Plattner returns. That Wells had been reading his fourth dimensional literature is clear from the effect the journey has had on Plattner: his entire anatomical structure has been inverted, his heart beating on his right side, and the'rest of his organs and extremities following suit: he has become his own mirror-image. In "Under the Knife" (1896), an anaesthetic administered to the narrator during an operation produces an out-of-the-body experience, followed by a journey through the cosmic emptiness of space, culminating in a transfiguring vision of the Creator. In "The Door in the Wall" (1906) a politician recalls that as a child he entered through a magical door, which opened onto an enchanted garden; he is haunted by the memory and spends his life trying to find it again. In each of these tales, the narrator leaves behind the normal, everyday world and enters a version of Hoffmann's Atlantis, that other world of the imagination. Unlike some of the other writers we've looked at, in Wells' case, the desire to inhabit the other world permanently didn't express itself in addiction to alcohol or drugs or in a pathetic attempt to renounce this world. Wells evolved from imaginative dreamer into an utopian socialist, and from WWI until his final disillusionment, wrote and rewrote his manifesto for transforming this world into the other. His "open conspiracy" earned him world renown and the company of political leaders like Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin. Whether it did his writing much good is still a debatable question.

"The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes" (1895 is another fourth dimension tale, this time involving a few other occult or paranormal activities, like clairvoyance, bi-location and `remote viewing'. During a thunderstorm, the unfortunate Davidson is caught between the poles of an electromagnet and receives a terrific shock. When he awakes his consciousness has been transported to a remote South Sea Island, while his body remains in the London laboratory. When he tries to walk along the beach, he smashes into equipment, and when he's moved about in London, he finds himself flying over the island, or sinking through solid rock. The fourth dimension and a kink in space are offered as answers to the phenomenon, but Bellows, Wells' narrator, a mundane sort of chap, rejects this idea as nonsense, although he admits he is no mathematician. What Wells himself thought of the fourth dimension is also debatable. He was a good friend of the aviator turned time theorist J.W. Dunne, author of the once popular An Experiment with Time (1927), which recounted Dunne's experiences with precognitive dreams.' The aviators who appear in many of Wells' stories were modelled on Dunne and in The Shape of Things to Come (1933), Wells uses Dunne's ideas about dreams and precognition to enable his narrator to read a history textbook written a century and a half in the future. Yet, Wells at one point changed his mind about his friend's theories, more or less retracting a favourable review he had given of one of Dunne's books, wanting to avoid the impression that he was giving it an endorsement.

Like many creative artists, however, Wells was not adverse to indulging in an activity we have associated with many occult thinkers: hypnagogia. In the preface to The Country of the Blind and Other Stories (1911) Wells described how he came to write his early stories.

I found that taking almost anything as a starting point and letting my thoughts play about with it, there would presently come out of the darkness, in a manner quite inexplicable, some absurd or vivid little nucleus. Little men in canoes upon sunlit oceans would come floating out of nothingness, incubating the eggs of prehistoric monsters unawares; violent conflicts would break out amidst the flower-beds of suburban gardens; I would discover I was peering into remote and mysterious worlds ruled by an order logical indeed but other than our common sanity.

The door in the wall, sought after in different ways by many of Wells' narrators, may not have been as hidden as he thought.

Algernon Blackwood

Algernon Blackwood had the kind of life most other writers only write about.` Today he is remembered chiefly by devotees of weird fiction, but in his own time Blackwood was an extremely popular writer, broadcaster and television personality, becoming a celebrity in the 1930s as radio's `Ghost Man', a sobriquet he accepted but never really liked. On 2 November 1936 he took part in the first television broadcast in Britain, filling a three minute slot in Alexandra Palace along with several other guests, including a Pearly King and the Queen of Blackfriars, in a show called Picture Page; he later became a regular guest on the BBC's Saturday Night Story, a position he shared with his fellow fantasist, Lord Dunsany. In 1949 Blackwood was awarded the Television Society Medal, a decoration he added to the CBE he received the same year. By the time of his death in 1951, Blackwood was a household name. He was famous until the early 1960s, and even reached a new audience via the weird fiction and fantasy revival of the late 60s and early 70s, a posthumous popularity enjoyed by Blackwood's fellow occultist and author, Arthur Machen.9 Machen's and Blackwood's names have often been linked, mostly because both were for a time members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and both were mystics of a sort. But the resemblance ends there. As we will see, Machen was an implacable enemy of the modern age; it's difficult picturing him as a television or radio celebrity of any kind. Blackwood too thought little of civilization, preaching throughout his many books a philosophy of cosmic unity and higher consciousness. But Blackwood had an adventurous, expansive spirit that Machen lacked, and this accounts for his fascinating life, and the curious power of his best writing.

Algernon Blackwood was born in Shooter's Hill, Kent, on 4 March 1869, the son of a clerk in the Treasury who later became Secretary of the Post Office. Blackwood grew up in a strict Evangelical household - his parents were converts to a Calvinist sect - but he rebelled early on, absorbing Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms, the Bhagavad Gita and books on theosophy; he would later become a member of the society. Blackwood attended several private schools, and spent a year (18851886) at the School of the Moravian Brotherhood in Konigsfeld, Germany. Here he was impressed by the military discipline, but also by a spirit of "gentleness and merciful justice." The next summer was spent in Switzerland, before being sent to Canada on business by his father. In 1888 Blackwood went to Edinburgh University but left the next year. In 1890, at the age of 21, he returned to Canada to seek his fortune.

These early travels set a pattern in Blackwood's life; for the rest of his days he remained a wanderer, eventually pruning his possessions down to a trunk, a change of clothes, his pyjamas and a typewriter. In Canada he failed as a dairy farmer and hotelier, and decided to cross the border into America. In New York Blackwood worked as a journalist with the Evening Sun. Innocent and trusting, Blackwood's roommate stole most of his savings, but Blackwood eventually tracked him down and had him arrested. Blackwood's days in New York were grim, and he tells the story in his autobiography Episodes Before Thirty (1923). Living in dire poverty, barely relieved by getting a post with the New York Times in 1895, it was only after becoming the private secretary to a banker in 1897 that Blackwood's circumstances improved.

In 1899 Blackwood returned to England, and got involved with other business schemes, one involving a powdered milk company. But business was not for him. He travelled to France, then to Germany. He went down the Danube, the setting for perhaps his most well known story, "The Willows," and climbed in the Alps. It was around this time that he became interested in magic and when he returned to London he joined the Golden Dawn. A meeting with a friend led to Blackwood submitting a collection of his stories to the publisher Eveleigh Nash. The Empty House appeared in 1906, followed by The Listener and Other Stories the next year. Then in 1908 Blackwood published John Silence - Physician Extraordinary. His fortune was made. The book was an instant success, combining two of popular fiction's current crazes, the occult and the investigative detective. John Silence was not, of course, the first or last of his kind. After Blackwood refused to follow up the initial collection, his publisher turned to the novelist William Hope Hodgson (The

House on the Borderland (1908)), who promptly created Carnacki, the Ghost Finder. Other occultists created their own mystical gumshoes, like Sax Rohmer's Morris Klaw, an Eastern European London emigre, who knows the Kabbalah and dreams the solutions to crimes. Rohmer too was apparently briefly a member of the Golden Dawn.

Blackwood, however, didn't need a Sherlock Holmes to perpetuate his success. Nash had launched the book with a massive advertising campaign, with some of the biggest posters yet seen on hoardings and buses, and Blackwood had made enough from the sales to concentrate full time on writing and developing his ideas. Several more collections appeared, as well as cosmic novels like The Human Chord (1910) and The Centaur (1911) - the latter based on Blackwood's travels in the Caucasus and perhaps the central expression of his mystical beliefs. A Prisoner of Fairyland (1913) was later transformed through the help of Sir Edgar Elgar into the musical The Starlight Express, whose title Andrew Lloyd Webber took for his own long-running musical. Later, in the 1920s, Blackwood turned his hand successfully to children's books. He was, by any account, a prolific writer as well as a man who, in Henry Miller's phrase, lived life "to the hilt". In fact Blackwood turns up in Miller's The Books in My Life (1952), where he calls Blackwood's novel The Bright Messenger (1921) "the most extraordinary novel on psychoanalysis ..." Miller too was a vagabond who came to writing late, and in several of his books displays a fascination with mysticism and the occult.

In the midst of all this travel and productivity - as well as a stint as a secret agent during WWI - Blackwood found time to devote himself to the mysteries. In 1900 he was introduced to the Hermetic Order of the Golden dawn through Yeats. When he joined members included Florence Farr, Maud Gonne, Constance Wilde, A.E. Waite, and Arthur Machen. The infamous Aleister Crowley and the order's dethroned despotic leader, MacGregor Mathers, had recently left: Mathers to set up a rival group in Paris, Crowley on a trip to Mexico. Blackwood spent the next two years studying Kabbalah, the Hebrew alphabet, alchemy and astrology. But magic per se was not Blackwood's forte, and after achieving the rank of Philosophus, he decided to stop. The Order itself suffered several blows, one of which, `the Horos scandal' - in which Mathers had been duped by a husband and wife team of sexual predators who used the society to gather prey - led to its reformation. A.E. Waite10 reformed the society again in 1903, and both Blackwood and Machen followed. But both soon lost interest and the society eventually faded. Later, both Machen and Blackwood would speak critically of their occult dabbling, but both would draw on it extensively as source material for their writing.

It would be wrong, however, to think of Blackwood as an occultist proper; he is much more of a mystic, and his best writing conveys a sense of the `unknown modes of being' that Wordsworth and his fellow Romantics saw in nature. Blackwood's real theme is the expansion of consciousness, and his eager mind followed up any possibility of achieving this. Like Wells, he was a friend ofJ.W. Dunne, and Dunne had read him extracts of his book An Experiment With Time before its publication. (A respected engineer, Dunne held off publishing for fear of being thought a crank.) Through recording his dreams, Dunne became aware that he often dreamt of future events. Dunne later developed his notion of `the serial universe', in which an infinite series of `me's' exist in parallel times. Blackwood met Dunne in 1925 and the friendship produced several stories dealing with kinks in time, but along with Dunne, and aside from Blackwood's own speculations, a central influence on his `space and time' tales is P.D. Ouspensky.

Through the courtesy of Lady Rothermere - estranged wife of Lord Rothermere, the newspaper baron, and devoted reader of Ouspensky's bestselling book of metaphysics, Tertium Organum" - Ouspensky escaped the refugee life of White Russian Constantinople, and in 1921 arrived in London, the "intellectual flavour of the month." Along with the other literary stars attending Ouspensky's lectures at Lady Rothermere's St. Johns Wood salon was Blackwood. But although Blackwood thought highly of Tertium Organum, he was less impressed with Ouspensky himself, finding his lectures dull. When Blackwood remarked on this, Ouspensky suggested he go to France and work directly with Gurdjieff, the source of the ideas, then setting up his `Prieure' in Fontainebleau. Blackwood did, and for the next two years Blackwood made frequent visits to Gurdjiefl's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man. He was not the only literary guest: others included Sinclair Lewis, A.R. Orage - who, after Ouspensky, became Gurdjieff's right-hand man - and, famously, Katharine Mansfield, who died there in 1922. Blackwood eventually had his fill of Gurdjieff as

well, and on his last visit found a reading of Gurdjieff's enormous Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson (1950) an exercise in "sheer megalomania," suggesting "paranoia."

Gurdjieff's and Ouspensky's ideas, however, came into his work, most notably in a late collection of stories, Shocks (1935). In the Gurdjieff "work," `shocks' is a technical term, describing certain influences that help in `waking up'. 'Waking up' is the central aim of Gurdjieff's teaching, and the idea that we are not truly awake surfaces in many of Blackwood's tales. In "The Pikestaffe Case" (Tongues of Fire (1924)), a teacher of higher mathematics and his student travel into the fourth dimension, encountering difficulties on the way. "I woke at 4 o'clock" one writes to the other. "About ten minutes later, as you said might happen, I woke a second time. The change into the second state was as great as the change from sleeping to waking ... But I could not remain `awake' ..." In "Elsewhere and Otherwise" - Blackwood's longest excursion into higher space - he speaks of horror as a "negative emo tion," another direct term from Gurdjieff. Mantravers, the central character, has spent a moment in the fourth dimension, amounting to four years in linear time. When he suddenly returns, he feels the restrictions of mundane life. "The cage is about me, the stupid, futile cage," he cries. "It's time that does it, it's your childish linear time, time in a single line. In such a limited state it's not even being awake, just trivial dreaming, almost death ..." Mantravers' colleague in the higher realms is a certain Dr. Vronski, known for his experiments with "glands, hypnotism, yoga," all ofwhich Ouspensky wrote about. And later, when the narrator finds himself in a German prisoner of war camp, he meets a Russian professor who speaks to him about the different dimensions of time ... In the title story, "Shocks," a young poet receives a mysterious legacy of five thousand pounds a year. ". . . shocks," he remarks "drive one explosively out of an accustomed rut. I'd willingly give my last ten years of living in a rut - crystallized - for the blessed shocks of this single, brief little hour." Along with `shocks', `crystallized' is another Gurdjieff term, denoting a consciousness almost irredeemably sunk in `sleep', although Gurdjiefl's own shocks generally came in a less desirable form.

Lord Dunsany

In 1905 a strange little volume appeared on the London bookstalls. Published by Elkin Mathews at the author's expense, its title was The Gods of Pegana, and in its pages, elegantly illustrated by the artist Sidney H. Sime, readers were introduced to a hitherto completely unknown pantheon. Mana-Yood-Sushai, Mung, Sish, Skarl, Roon, Slid and other weird, unfamiliar names rose out of the orotund, biblical sentences. Flush with archaic, lapidary prose their rolling, rhythmic flow had a curiously dreamlike effect. Halfforgotten memories of ancient lands and lost worlds, of mystical gods and timeless goddesses, drifted through the sonorous, perfumed language, the effect being something like that of a dose of opium. Yet there was also something else, a sense of melancholy, a world weariness, pessimism even. These tales were of gods who were no more. Voluptuous, regal, these jewelled prose poems spoke of the passing of beings whose beauty and magnificence were more than superhuman, and yet they too came at last to an end.

The moral, if there was one, seemed to be that in this land of shadows, even the immortals must decline. Life, existence, the entire universe was merely an entertaining pastime, a game set to occupy the idle minds of bored, indifferent deities, who occasionally put away the pieces until sheer ennui brought them out again. Schopenhauer had said it before, as did Wagner. It was a theme well suited to the sophisticated decadence of the late fin de siecle, and here it was in a beautiful, slim package.

The author of these tales, however, was no mystical dreamer or drug addicted occultist labouring away in a freezing garret. Born in 1878 at his family estate in County Meath, Ireland, Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett - better known as Lord Dunsany - was the 18th Baron Dunsany, the proud inheritor of one of the most ancient baronial titles in the British Isles. He was also a Conservative candidate in his constituency, the owner of 1,400 acres, a big game hunter, sportsman, traveller and veteran of the Boer War. Educated at Eton and Sandhurst, Dunsany in many ways had the kind of aristocratic life that Villiers de l'Isle-Adam had only dreamt of, and it is perhaps because of this that his writing, popular in his lifetime, is now, aside from weird fantasy enthusiasts, mostly forgotten. After publishing The Gods of Pegana Dunsany put aside any thoughts about politics - he was, after all, only drawn to it because he thought he had to do something - and

became a full time writer. Yet, although he published stories, poems, plays, novels, essays and autobiographies well into the 1950s - at one time five of Dunsany's plays were on Broadway simultaneously - writing for Dunsany seemed always an amateur activity. He had an intellect, he said, but he didn't care to use it, except when playing chess. He may have been telling the truth: Dunsany once won the chess championship of Ireland, and in 1929 even managed to hold the World Champion, Capablanca, to a draw. Yet this seems to emphasize the point: his mind was only good for playing games, not for anything serious. In fact, one wonders if Dunsany ever took anything seriously. With everything handed to him, he may have had no reason to. As his friend Yeats declared, "Fifty pounds a year and a drunken mistress" would have done him well.

The picture book nihilism that infuses his stories and plays12 may at the time have seemed deeply profound. It doesn't today, and for all Dunsany's activity, suggests a kind of laziness. Dunsany never really considered himself a literary man, even after producing more than sixty titles, and was more at home as a soldier and a hunter. But he had, as the critic E.F. Bleiler remarked, a dubious talent for turning almost anything into a saleable story: Dunsany once claimed that he could write a story about the mud of the Thames, and did. But this knack for `dashing things off' - he wrote quickly with little revision - useful for the journalist, is deadly for the serious writer. Dunsany's exotic fatalism, reminiscent of Omar Khayyam, is not, as the scholar S.T. Joshi would have it, "Nietzsche in a fairy tale," or if it is, it is a severely truncated Nietzsche, lacking the Ubermensch and Nietzsche's belief in the need to transcend nihilism. Dunsany, who never cared to use his intellect, clearly lacked any beliefs other than in the value of sport and fine living. As his biographer wrote of his work, it shows "a complete lack of interest in any connection with the real world . . ." Dunsany "had a remarkable lack of curiosity about people" and "saw the world almost entirely in terms of himself and his reactions ... He had no interest in injecting a message or indeed any thought ...s13 Dunsany once defined genius as "an infinite capacity for not taking pains. i14 Clearly, by his own account, he possessed it.

Which is not, of course, to say his writing is without merit. The Gods of Pegana, Time and The Gods (1906), A Dreamer's Tales (1910), are beautiful, in a cloisonne sort of way. Yet like sweets or caviar, a small amount satisfies; more than this and one wants meatier stuff. What remains of Dunsany's enormous output are these early fantastic tales, whose atmosphere is inimitable, and whose influence on subsequent fantasists can hardly be exaggerated. Lovecraft, Tolkien, Eddison, and the other names making up the adult fantasy canon, would not have had a genre to work in, if Dunsany hadn't created it.

Like Wells, Dunsany wasn't an occultist, and his story, "The Hashish Man" (A Dreamer's Tales), seems to me a possible spoof on the practice of using hashish as a means of stimulating `astral travel', indulged in by his friend Yeats. Another magician who appreciate Dunsany's work was Aleister Crowley. On reading "The Hashish Man" the Great Beast wrote its author a fan letter, a rare occurrence indeed. Crowley's only criticism was that Dunsany had obviously not tried the drug himself. "I see you only know it (hashish) by hearsay, not by experience. You have not confused time and space as the true eater does.s15 With his letter Crowley enclosed some erotic magazines, perhaps hoping to open the young author's mind to other transgressive delights. Dunsany appreciated the praise, and replied that he never took anything stronger than tea. What he did with the magazines is unknown.

R.M. Bucke

In 1901 a book with the intriguing title Cosmic Consciousness appeared in Philadelphia in a limited edition of five hundred copies. Its author was Richard Maurice Bucke, a doctor and former medical superintendent of the asylum for the insane in London, Ontario. Although at first the book made little impression, interest in its remarkable claim - that humanity was slowly evolving into a higher level of consciousness - attracted attention, and soon its readers included the psychologist William James and the esoteric philosopher P.D. Ouspensky. More than half a century later it had acquired even greater popularity. By 1966 Cosmic Consciousness had gone through twenty-six printings and had become, along with Hermann Hesse's

Siddhartha, Aldous Huxley's The Doors of Perception, and J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of The Rings, part of the canon of works inspiring the burgeoning counterculture. Among others, Timothy Leary was one of its most fervent readers.

Bucke's background wasn't what you might expect for the head of an insane asylum, nor, for that matter, the author of a book arguing that the human race was moving into a higher state of consciousness. Born in 1837 to English parents who soon after emigrated to Canada, Bucke left home at seventeen after the death of his stepmother and spent the next four years involved in dozens of adventures. Crossing the border into the United States, he travelled across the country, working at a variety of jobs. He was a gardener in Ohio, a railway man in Cincinnati, and a deckhand on a Mississippi steamboat, before finally signing on as a driver on a wagon train heading across the Great Plains to the edge of the Mormon territory, today part of Nevada. The journey to Salt Lake took five months, and in the 1850s it was a dangerous business. For the last twelve hundred miles there were no white settlements and the Indians, resentful of the white man's incursion, were not particularly friendly. After this Bucke crossed the Rockies, was attacked by Shoshone Indians, and nearly starved, living for a time on flour and hot water. He then settled down as a gold miner. During an attempt to cross a mountain chain in winter, his companion died, and Bucke himself was about to follow when he was discovered by a mining party. Both of his feet were frozen, and all of one foot and part of the other had to be amputated. Bucke was twenty-one, and for the rest of his life, he would only occasionally be free from physical pain.

An inheritance paid for his medical training in Europe, and in 1864 he settled in Canada. By 1876 he had been appointed superintendent of an asylum for the insane in Hamilton, Ontario; the next year he moved to London. In 1888 he was elected president of the Psychological Section of the British Medical Association, and in 1890 was given a similar honour by the American Medico-Psychological Association. By the end of the century, Bucke was considered one of North America's foremost `alienists' (an early term for psychiatrist), and this standing among professionals helped his extraordinary ideas about human evolution gain a hearing they might otherwise have lacked.`

Bucke's tenacity and application give the impression of a highly practical, down-to-earth man, suggesting that the picture of him as a philosopher of a radical shift in human consciousness is somewhat incongruous, although the portrait of him in Cosmic Consciousness, with his flowing white beard and longish hair, does suggest the air of a prophet. Yet there was another side to Bucke. Growing up on a backwoods Canadian farm, he developed a sensitivity to nature and experienced a powerful curiosity about the basic mysteries of life. At about the age of ten he felt a strange ecstasy and longing about the notion of death. A voracious reader of poetry, in later life Bucke was known to have memorized whole volumes of it. Bucke's father, a Cambridge graduate, had himself mastered seven languages, and when he moved his young family from England to the wilds of Ontario he brought with him a library of some thousand volumes. Bucke grew up in an atmosphere of rugged hands-on experience softened by literary discussion; more than likely it was this that prepared him for his later work as a visionary and prophet.

The first sign of that vocation appeared in 1867 when a visitor to Bucke's home quoted some of the poetry of Walt Whitman. The effect was immediate; Bucke was bowled over and from that moment considered himself the poet's disciple. Ten years later Bucke met Whitman and became a central figure in his circle, even treating Whitman in his medical capacity, successfully, as the poet later claimed the doctor saved his life. One of the volumes of poetry Bucke was reported to know by heart was Whitman's Leaves of Grass.

Five years after his introduction to Whitman's poetry, Bucke had the experience that set him on his life's work and contributed to the language a phrase most people use without the slightest idea of its origin. At thirty-five, during a visit to England, Bucke had his illumination. After an evening spent reading Wordsworth, Shelly, Keats, Browning, and, of course, Whitman, Bucke left his friends and settled into his hansom cab for the drive to his hotel. The night of poetry had left him calm, his mind full of the ideas and feelings stimulated by the evening's discussion. He felt himself in a state of "quiet, almost passive, enjoyment."

And then it happened:

All at once, without warning of any kind, he [Bucke wrote his account in the third person] found himself

wrapped around, as it were, by a flame-coloured cloud. For an instant he thought of fire - some sudden conflagration in the great city. The next instant he knew that the light was within himself.

Directly after there came upon him a sense of exaltation, of immense joyousness, accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination quite impossible to describe. Into his brain streamed one momentary lightning-flash of the Brahmic Splendour which ever since lightened his life. Upon his heart fell one drop of the Brahmic Bliss, leaving thenceforward for always an aftertaste of Heaven. Among other things he did not come to believe, he saw and knew that the Cosmos is not dead matter but a living Presence, that the soul of man is immortal, that the universe is so built and ordered that without peradventure all things work together for the good of each and all, that the foundation principle of the world is what we call love and that the happiness of every one is in the long run absolutely certain.

"The supreme occurrence of that night," Bucke said, was his "initiation in the new and higher order of ideas." Within a few seconds Bucke learned more than "in previous months or years of study," as well as "much that no study could ever have taught.""

Nowadays Bucke's experience would be chalked up to the brain's reported "God spot" or, less generously, to temporal lobe epilepsy.'H For Bucke it was the first glimpse of the future of humanity.

Having experienced the reality of this new consciousness, Bucke looked for other examples of it. There were, he believed, at least fourteen cases of it, ranging from ancient times to the present. Buddha, Jesus, St. Paul, Plotinus, Jacob Boehme, William Blake, and, of course, Walt Whitman are all clear examples of full and complete cosmic consciousness. Others on this list include Balzac, while Emanuel Swedenborg is classed with the "Lesser, Imperfect and Doubtful Instances", which may strike some of us as odd. Some of Bucke's other choices also seem questionable, as do some of his remarks about primitive and backward races, and his assumption that the Aryans form a recognized higher type. One example of cosmic consciousness that Bucke was certain of was the Edwardian writer, traveller and vegetarian, Edward Carpenter. Influential in his own time but little read today, Carpenter is a perfect example of the blend of progressive ideas, evolutionary vision, mystical doctrines, and radical lifestyle that characterized the pre-World War I New Age. The author of Whitmanesque verse - Bucke points to his long poem Towards Democracy as a work in which "the Cosmic Sense speaks" - Carpenter was homosexual and an outspoken advocate of what we would call gay rights (Carpenter's own term was "homogenic love"). It's unclear how much Bucke knew or understood of this side of Carpenter's life. Carpenter himself is alleged to have had sexual relations with Whitman and, toward the end of his life, with the astrologer Gavin Arthur, later well known in the 1960s as the popularizer of the Age of Aquarius.'9 In From Adam's Peak to Elephanta, an account of his travels in India, Carpenter gives an extended description of "consciousness without thought," and relates it to several themes that will be picked up later by Ouspensky, such as the fourth dimension. Unusual states of consciousness weren't the only things Carpenter was known for: he also has the distinction of being the first man in England to popularize sandals.

Bucke's optimism about the evolution of consciousness was parallelled by an equal assurance in our material perfection. The 20th century would, he believed, see human life transformed by the conquest of the air - just getting off the ground at Kitty Hawk - and the triumph of socialism. "The immediate future of our race," he wrote, "is indescribably hopeful. ,211 It may have been a blessing for Bucke that he was not around to see the Old World collapse less than two decades later. In February 1902, after an evening discussing the theory that Francis Bacon was the real author of the Shakespeare plays - Bucke firmly believed he was - he slipped on some ice while gazing at the night sky from his veranda. He fell, hitting his head violently against a pillar, and died almost immediately.

PD. Ouspensky

Although to most readers Peter Demian Ouspensky is known, if at all, as the most articulate disciple of the enigmatic G.I. Gurdjieff, he was in his own right a thinker of considerable merit, and it is possible that his

meeting with that remarkable man was perhaps the worst thing that ever happened to him21. After breaking with Gurdjieff in 1924, Ouspensky set himself up in London as a teacher of Gurdjieff's ideas, disseminating them in a dry, professorial manner to the likes of Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, Christopher Isherwood, T.S. Eliot and Algernon Blackwood.22 The situation may seem strange; but as Ouspensky himself points out in his posthumously published In Search of the Miraculous (1949), an account of his early years with Gurdjieff, by 1917 - two years after their initial meeting in a seedy Moscow cafe - he had begun to separate the man Gurdjieff from his teaching, finding fault with the former, but maintaining the importance of the later. Yet, in 1947, just months before his death, brought on by heavy drinking, Ouspensky held a series of talks that have gone down as legendary in the history of "the work," the name given to Gurdjiefl's peculiar system of "harmonious development." Returning to a post-war London after sitting out the Blitz in the US, Ouspensky shocked his audience by repudiating the system he had devoted more than twenty-five years to propagating. All of the retinue of "work" ideas: "selfremembering," "sleep," our different "I's," the fact that we are all "machines," were denied by the aged and ailing master. Ouspensky rejected the teaching he had given his life to, and advised his listeners to think for themselves. The effect was electrifying. After his death, around which hovered strange circumstances and paranormal events, many of his students, rudderless, eventually found their way to Gurdjieff, the very man that Ouspensky had warned them against and over whom, no doubt, he had lost much sleep. To this day the relationship between the two is the stuff of myth and psychodrama, with Ouspensky cast as a treacherous Judas, stealing his guru's teaching, and Gurdjieff playing the black magician, power mad and insatiable, intent on dominating all around him.

That Ouspensky made such a profound volte face was not unusual for him. He is, if not unique, certainly one of the most self-critical and painfully honest, as well as readable, writers on esotericism. Having once adopted Gurdjiefl's austere and unromantic ideas, Ouspensky looked back on his earlier self with some disparagement, calling his Tertium Organum, the book that made his reputation, a weakness. Yet it is this book, more than any other, that communicates the best in Ouspensky: his vital, questing mind and fiery enthusiasm. All of his other works share a certain pessimism, perhaps most obvious in the theme of his single novel Strange Life of Ivan Osokin (1915-1949), which is a working of Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence, the idea that we live our lives over and over again. As a child in Moscow, where he was born in 1878, Ouspensky early on had powerful experiences of dejd vu, that strange feeling that "I have been here before." Today, most clinical psychologists root this in crossed wires in the brain, but Ouspensky would reject such an explanation. To him there was clearly something wrong with our ideas about time.

Like Nietzsche, Ouspensky's thought swung between the grim vision of an infinite series of himself, eternally making the same mistakes, and the profoundly optimistic counterweight of the superman which, in Ouspensky's case, meant a being endowed with a large helping of Bucke's cosmic consciousness. That Ouspensky had at least a taste of this is clear from his remarkable essay "Experimental Mysticism." Following William James, Ouspensky engaged in a series of experiments with nitrous oxide. In his little room in St. Petersburg, he inhaled the gas, and more than likely experimented with hashish as well, finding himself thrown into a strange world of living hieroglyphs and weird, inexplicable phenomena. It was his inability to bring back anything concrete from these experiences that led Ouspensky on his quest to find a teaching that could somehow show him the way.

There is good reason to believe that when Ouspensky met Gurdjieff, that "sly man's" dour doctrine - that man is a machine with only the slimmest possibility of gaining freedom - combined with Ouspensky's own Romantic worldrejection to push him into an attitude of Stoic resignation. At any rate, he wrote little after working with Gurdjieff, and the last book published in his lifetime, A New Model of the Universe (1931) (which includes "Experimental Mysticism"), is a collection of essays originally written in his pre-Gurdjieff days, re-worked and brought up to date. Many of the chapters deal with themes similar to Tertium Organum: the fourth dimension, the superman, eternal recurrence, and Ouspensky's own version of the new physics. But through it all runs the idea of esotericism, the notion that behind the everyday world, we can find traces of a hidden hand, the influence of esoteric schools, whose teaching offer the only hope of escaping the wheel of life. Ouspensky believed in this idea fiercely, and in his last days, seeing in Gurdjieff a tainted source, he made plans for journeys into Central Asia, the area of the world most likely, he believed, to harbour traces of the secret schools.

These would not be his first journeys to the east. Before meeting Gurdjieff, Ouspensky had acquired a reputation in pre-Revolutionary Moscow and St. Petersburg as a journalist, mostly for his accounts of his search for the miraculous in India, Egypt, Ceylon and Central Asia. Indeed, it is precisely because of his reputation that Gurdjieff had him ensnared. Returning to Moscow after his fruitless search for schools, Ouspensky was astounded to discover a source of the secret teaching right in his own backyard. Yet, while downing glasses of Montrachet in his last, lonely days, Ouspensky often thought nostalgically of his early years in Russia, before he met Gurdjieff, when his lectures on the superman or the fourth dimension would draw thousands of listeners. He would also remember his late night sessions at St. Petersburg's Stray Dog Cafe, a meeting place for Symbolist poets and other members of the avant garde, and the place where Ouspensky rubbed shoulders with the likes of Anna Akmahtova. It was the same milieu as that of Briusov and, another writer we will meet shortly, Andrei Bely. Had Ouspensky not cast in his lot with Gurdjieff, there is good reason to believe that he would be spoken of today in the same breath as Berdyaev, Merzhkovsky and Soloviev. As it is, the influence of Tertium Organum on the Russian avant garde has, in recent years, received more attention. Among other painters, Kasimir Malevich was influenced by Ouspensky's writing on higher space, and even Berdyaev, who was very critical of the occult influence of Rudolf Steiner on the Russian intelligentsia, spoke of Ouspensky as the only theosophical writer worth reading.

The youthful Ouspensky had a poetic soul, a romantic, vulnerable side that comes out in his early writings, like the collection of stories translated as Talks With The Devil (1916-1973). It also appears in one of his earliest books, The Symbolism of the Tarot originally published in Russia in 1911. Combining his ideas on time, consciousness and secret knowledge, this series of poetic prose sketches was later reworked and included as a chapter in A New Model of the Universe. Yet, as some commentators have remarked, it is in striking contrast to his more rigorous, stern dicta on recurrence, sex and the laws of Manu. Perhaps the strict taskmaster of "the work" could not let go of his earlier, more human self.

Like many drawn to the occult tradition, Ouspensky thought little of socialism and other egalitarian movements. Disagreeing with Bucke's democratic view of cosmic consciousness, he argued that the superman would be a product of high culture, not an inevitable advance of the race. Crossing Russia during the Revolution, Ouspensky had an opportunity to consider these ideas. Separated from Gurdjieff by the warring White and Red armies, stranded in the backwater of Ekaterinodar, Ouspensky wrote a series of Letters from Russia, published in A.R. Orage's journal The New Age. His account of looting, murder and other atrocities perpetrated by the Bolsheviks was sobering reading for many sympathetic to the Soviet experiment. Reaching Constantinople in 1920, Ouspensky never set foot in Russia again. Throughout his years as an exile he maintained a fierce, implacable hatred of bolshevism, seeing in it the most vile example of the "history of crime," a virulent barbarism intent on overthrowing what was left of western culture. Ouspensky however had no love for the czarist regime; in 1905 his beloved sister was arrested as a dissident and locked up in the Boutirsky Prison in Moscow, where she died. It was grim realities like these that drove him to reading works on occultism while working as a journalist on a Moscow newspaper, and led him, eventually, on his long search for the miraculous.

Aleister Crowley

The most notorious magician of the 20th century was born Edward Alexander Crowley on 12 October 1875 in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire; he later transformed himself to Aleister to avoid sharing a name with his father,23 one of many transformations throughout a long and turbulent career. Between his coming of age and his death in 1947, Crowley adopted a whole series of other selves. There was, for example, Brother Perdurabo. There were also the Laird of Boleskine, Prince Chioa Khan, Count Svareff, Ankh-f-n-Khonsu, and Simon Iff. If we count his identity with his `higher self', there was also Aiwass, a supernatural being from another dimension, approachable through sex, drugs and magical ritual. Bringing in the many individuals Crowley claimed to have been in past lives - like Cagliostro and Eliphas Levi - swells the ranks even further. But it was the nickname given him by his puritanical Plymouth Brethren mother that set the course of Crowley's life. Rebelling against an arid fundamentalism, Edward so angered his mother that she called him

the Great Beast 666 from the Book of Revelations. Crowley agreed and acted accordingly. This petulant spitefulness remained throughout his life. Along with an ability to justify all of his actions, it created an ego impervious to criticism. Crowley believed in himself and in his mission, which often enough were identical. His mother didn't know what she unleashed upon the world.

Crowley's history has been told several times24. Since his revival in the late 1960s (both the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were impressed by him) and adoption by the devotees of heavy metal, he's achieved a posthumous notoriety that far exceeds the infamy of his day. Today, "Do what thou wilt," the catch phrase of Crowley's religion of thelema, is teenage lingo. As his own plunge into sex and sadism was prompted by his intolerable upbringing, Crowley's philosophy of indulgence appeals to the young, hemmed in by parental restrictions. Most people, however, get through this phase and adjust to life. Crowley made a religion of it, with himself, the Master Therion (the Great Beast in Greek), as high priest and deity.

Crowley absorbed an enormous amount of experience. He climbed the Himalayas, walked across China, learned several languages, squandered a fortune, and belonged to several occult orders. He took a startling amount of drugs, and had erotic relations with members of both sex in a variety of ways and places, was a chess champion, wrote German propaganda during WWI and enjoyed the rare distinction of having his own magical abbey shut down by Mussolini. He was also in and out of the tabloids during the 1920s and 30s, and earned the tag of "the wickedest man in the world." Though technically not a black magician, there was little of the light about him, and as most accounts of his life relate, he left a trail of madness and shattered lives. Few close to him emerged unharmed.

As mentioned earlier, Crowley became interested in magic (or `magick', as he would spell it) through a book of A.E. Waite's. Later, after reading Eckharthausen's The Cloud upon the Sanctuary, he became obsessed with the idea of a secret magical order. In 1898, while on a skiing trip in Switzerland, he met the chemist Julian L. Baker who introduced him to George Cecil Jones. It was through Jones that Crowley became a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, initiated into the society as Brother Perdurabo, "one who will endure to the finish."

For the rest of his life, Crowley devoted himself to rehabilitating the reputation of magick. First, through study and mastery of a variety of occult arts, mostly Kabbalah and cere monial magic; then through the propagation of his religion. Initially called Crowleyanity - an obvious dig at Christianity - then thelema, the teaching came to him in the revelation of The Book of the Law in Cairo in 1904. Leaving the Golden Dawn in 1900, Crowley avoided magic for some time and turned his mind to Buddhism and meditation. Inheriting a considerable fortune, he threw himself into his other loves, travel and mountaineering. Crowley was a good, if unorthodox mountaineer; his ascent of Chogo-Ri in the Himalayas, the world's second highest mountain, though a failure, is impressive. But his later attempt on Kanchenjunga ended in ignominy, when he refused to help members of his party who had met with an accident. Crowley left them to their fate and several men died. He then excused himself in a spate of self-justifying newspaper articles, after withdrawing all of the expedition's funds from the bank.

In 1904, as mentioned, Crowley received a communication from the Secret Chiefs, his version of Blavatsky's hidden masters. Through the medium of his first wife Rose - who later died a dipsomaniac - Crowley received the sacred text of his religion, the aforementioned Book of the Law. On 8 April a voice spoke out of the air in his hotel room in Cairo, revealing the new Word of the Aeon. He wrote at a feverish pace, capturing the doctrine he spent the rest of his life advocating. It was a heady blend of Nietzsche and de Slide, served up in fin de siecle prose, and assorted Egyptian motifs. Crowley convinced himself, and later many others, that it prophesised the dawning of a new age, and that he was its reluctant avatar.

Crowley claimed that the Book of the Law was unlike any of his previous writings and clearly showed an alien hand. Any reader of Crowley's poetry will find this difficult to accept. By the time he received the Book of the Law, Crowley had already distinguished himself as a poet - at least to his own satisfaction - with several elegant, if self-published volumes. His first, Alcedema, A Place to Bury Strangers In, by "a gentleman of the University of Cambridge," was privately printed in 1898 in an edition of one hundred copies. The poem is a long exercise in blasphemy, degradation and masochism; the title refers to the field

bought with Judas' thirty pieces of silver. With this first effort Crowley believed he had "attained, at a bound, the summit of Parnassus." The book, however, was not well received. A few other gentlemen of the University of Cambridge read it, and remarked that it should not be shown to the young. Undeterred (more likely encouraged) Crowley went on to produce poetry for the rest of his life. He wrote Swinburnian odes well into the heyday of modernism and seems not to have paid much attention to any poetry written after Wilde.

Crowley's choice of nom de plume for his first published work was an homage to Shelley's The Necessity of Atheism, whose author was "a gentleman of the University of Oxford." Crowley had a habit of associating himself with the greats of English literature; of his birthplace he famously said that it was "a strange coincidence that one small county should have given England her two greatest poets - for one must not forget Shakespeare. "25 The humour is typical, as is the inordinate self-esteem, suggesting in fact a sense of inferiority, one so great that even becoming a god did not quite compensate for it. (Crowley believed he had become a god in 1921, when he reached the magical rank of Ipsissimus). Every writer is touchy about his work, but Crowley was positively paranoid. When he brought the proofs of his verse play Jephthah (1898) (another privately printed work) to show his magical brother Yeats, he was crestfallen at the poet's unenthusiastic response. "He forced himself to utter a few polite conventionalities," Crowley recalled, but Frater Perdurabo could see through the sham. It was obvious that "black, bilious rage shook him to the soul." The reason? Yeats had obviously recognized in Crowley's work the hand of a poet much greater than himself...

Jephthah, like much of Crowley's poetry, is fairly tough reading. It is not, as his biographer Martin Booth remarks, "true poetry, which, at its best, has that indefinable substance in it, that certain untouchable quality of the soul ... X26 Except for a few pieces, Crowley's poetry is mostly derivative and second rate, when it is not downright pornographic and nasty, as is his highly collectable collection White Stains (1898). Crowley, however, thought so well of his verse that in 1907 he published (privately again) his Collected Works. To stimulate notice, he offered a £100 prize for the best critical essay on his oeuvre. The announcement for the competition is typical:

The Chance of the Year!

The Chance of the Century!!

The Chance of the Geological Period!!!

Two years passed before anyone responded. Captain J.F.C. Fuller's effusive The Star of the West, which proclaimed that "Crowley is more than a new-born Dionysus, he is more than a Blake, a Rabelais, or a Heine ..." won hands down. Being the only entry, that was not difficult. Fuller became one of the early thelemites and Crowley, notorious for his meanness, neglected to pay him his prize. Later a noted military historian, Fuller had a thing for charismatic men, and was the only Englishman to attend Adolf Hitler's fiftieth birthday party.

Crowley, however, can be readable, especially when he is talking about himself, a good trait in a raconteur, but deadly in a poet. His massive Confessions (complete edition 1969) exhibits the same megalomania (Crowley called it an "autohagiography"), yet it is entertaining and in places displays insight. His two occult novels, Diary of a Drug Fiend (1922), a fictionalized account of his Abbey of Thelema, and Moonchild (1929), a spiteful dig at the Golden Dawn, are enjoyable. Even some of the strictly magical texts, like the early Book Four (1911) and the later Eight Lectures on Yoga (1939) present no problems to the interested student, unlike his impenetrable magnum opus, Magick in Theory and Practice (1929), which fails in its attempt to bring his message to the average reader, who hasn't the slightest idea what he's talking about. It's in this work, however, that perhaps his best poem makes an importance appearance.

Crowley's Hymn to Pan was first published in his magical magazine The Equinox, original issues of which are now highly collectable and fetch considerable sums. To have included it in his message to the world attests to the importance it had for its author. It is a highly effective piece of incantatory writing. Best read aloud, its succeeds admirably in evoking a sense of an impending crisis: the appearance of the ancient god of madness. Today it is often used by Crowley's devotees in their rituals, and it was read, much to the

consternation of the city council, by Crowley's friend Louis Wilkinson, in Brighton on 5 December 1947, when Crowley was cremated. Wilkinson, a friend of another magical writer, John Cowper Powys (and as Louis Marlow, author of the Ouspenskyean novel The Devil in Crystal (1944)), was originally supposed to read the whole of The Book of the Law over Crowley's coffin. At the last minute, he quite rightly chose instead this moving, memorable paean to his departed friend's favourite deity.

Crowley's relationship with other poets is curious. We've seen his reaction to Yeats. His most well known literary association was with the poet Victor Neuberg, with whom Crowley engaged in homosexual magic in North Africa and other places, evoking the demon Choronzon. Neuberg was understandably shaken by the affair and, like many involved with Crowley, came away from their association damaged.27 Outside of magical circles, Neuberg is practically unknown today, although he has a small niche in literary history as the man who discovered Dylan Thomas. Crowley seemed to have had a negative effect on Neuberg's protege as well, chasing Thomas out of a London pub with a feat of clairvoyance. Strangely, although no friend of modernism, Crowley's work had a powerful effect on the eccentric Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, today recognized as one of the central figures in European modernism, and who, like Crowley, had a penchant for other identities. The two corresponded on magical matters, but Pessoa is most known to Crowleyites as the man who helped the Great Beast fake a suicide in Lisbon. Pessoa himself was a highly hermetic writer, and his contribution to the occult will be looked at in the book's concluding essay.

Arthur Machen

The career of Arthur Machen is enough to make any wouldbe writer think twice about the prospects of making a living with his pen. With the exception of Henry Miller, I can think of no one who so self-consciously set himself the task of becoming a writer and who wrote so much about the process. Yet, unlike his brother in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Machen never achieved the kind of popularity enjoyed by Algernon Blackwood. The brief spurt of literary fame that did come his way in the 1920s, though appreciative of his genius, did not help him financially. Throughout his life Machen never quite escaped the poverty of his childhood. All accounts of him depict a robust, life-affirming character - Chestertonian in outlook and girth - full of contempt for the modern age, but thankful for life's small pleasures. Yet there is a grim, stoic atmosphere around Machen; with Blake he shares the poet's ability to maintain a much needed self-belief in the face of almost universal ignorance. Today he is known only to aficionados of the Golden Dawn and connoisseurs of gaslight and horror, though he is perhaps, more than any other, the writer for whom London was the most mystical arcana of all.

Arthur Machen21 was born Arthur Llewelyn Jones on 3 March 1863 in Caerleon-on-Usk, Gwent, and died in St. Joseph's Nursing Home, Beaconsfield, on 15 December 1947. He was eighty-four. Like many writers Arthur was a dreamy, solitary child, and he spent his early years reading and wandering in his beloved Welsh countryside. Literature, ancient ruins, the beauties of nature and the sense that behind them lay some vast secret - the basic occult sensibility - were the strongest influences on him. A good student, in 1880 at seventeen Arthur had to leave school because his impoverished clergyman father could not afford the fees. That same year he. made his first visit to London, where he failed the preliminary examination for the Royal College of Surgeons. It was also at this time that he adopted Machen, his mother's maiden name, and decided that he wanted to become a writer. One hundred copies of a first attempt, Eleusinia, a long poem about the ancient Greek mystery tradition, was published the next year, and on the strength of this Machen's parents believed his fortune lay in journalism. He was sent to London again to learn the trade.

He failed then too, and found work as a publisher's clerk and then a tutor, but oddly enough, for most of his life Machen did earn his living as a journalist, working on a number of London papers. It's difficult to see the Celtic mystic Machen in the cutthroat world of Fleet Street, but from 1909 until the '20s, Machen was a regular figure there, in his Inverness cape, felt hat and nearly shoulder-length white hair.29 Machen later said that having to write under a deadline eventually helped him to a mastery of style. A look at his later work shows less of a love for fine writing, the hurdle most modern readers hit in approaching him. However, it's the early decadent Machen that is the focus of a fiercely devoted cult.

Machen's early years in London were an exercise in patience, endurance and want. Living alone in a tiny room on tea, bread and tobacco, Machen found himself in a sprawling, impersonal metropolis, his only escape his long, rambling walks through the city's interminable streets, recounted in books like Things Near and Far (1923) and The London Adventure (1924). Other would-be writers who launched themselves on the capital seemed to have their way made easy through friends, acquaintances, and family. Machen had none of this; what was worse, he felt a deadening inability to transfer the insights of his imagination onto the page. He was gripped by a "stuttering awkwardness" whenever he thought of "attempting the great speech of literature . . . " This excruciating pressure crushes most aspiring artists, as it does the hero of Machen's novel The Hill of Dreams (1907). To Machen's credit, he stuck to his dream and eventually made it come true.

From 1883 to 1890 Machen worked at becoming a man of letters, producing several books and translations, including the twelve volume Memoirs of]acques Casanova, now the standard edition. In 1884 he was hired to catalogue a collection of occult texts, and it was this, as well as his meeting with A.E. Waite a few years later, that turned his thoughts to magic. Then, in 1890, Machen had his breakthrough. The first chapter of his macabre tale The Great God Pan was published in a literary journal, The Whirlwind; two years later it appeared in book form, along with- another weird story, "The Inmost Light." It was more a success d'estime than a financial one, but even here Machen found himself running up against difficulties. Machen's story recounts a gruesome tale of a scientist's attempts to dissolve the veil of the external world, and reveal the secret of reality. In order to do this he performs a brain operation on a young girl. Predictably, the results are shattering: she has a vision of the great god Pan, goes mad and is put in an asylum, where she eventually dies. Not, however, before giving birth to a beautiful daughter, the product of her union with the object of her mind-blowing vision. In later years the girl becomes an evil femme fatale, triggering a rash of suicides in Victorian London.

The story made Machen's name, but his notoriety was not always welcome. While The Great God Pan found friends among the decadents it outraged more conservative critics and readers. Oscar Wilde, Machen's occasional dining companion and his only real link to the decadent movement, called it un grand succes.30 But not everyone agreed. The Westminster Gazette called it "an incoherent nightmare of sex." For the Manchester Guardian it was ". . . the most acutely and intentionally disagreeable (book) we have yet seen in English." Other mainstream papers offered a similar response. A literary agent Machen met at the time remarked that while having tea with "some ladies in Hampstead" he mentioned his story "and their opinion seemed to be that ... The Great God Pan should never have been written." They were not alone. Although its shocking effects seem dated today, in the Yellow Nineties, Machen's tale entered dangerous territory. He had `arrived', but the philistinism he would bash his head against for the rest of his life was undeterred.

Machen continued to write, and it's in this period - 1890-1900 - that his most characteristic work appears. Other strange stories, like "The White People" and "The Shining Pyramid," as well as his Stevensonian novel The Three Impostors (1895), earned Machen an enduring place in the history of weird fiction. It's now that his basic theme emerges: that beneath the veneer of modern civilization lie ancient, atavistic forces that man encounters at his peril. It was a theme that H.P. Lovecraft, a great fan of Machen, would later adopt in the stories in his `Cthulhu Mythos'. Although they were quite different characters - Machen a religious man and Lovecraft an atheist - Machen and Lovecraft shared a profound disgust with the modern world, and in their tales there is a feeling that they are, at least in part, getting back at a civilization they find revolting. (Blackwood, however, who Lovecraft also thought highly of, and who also believed in a lost, primal world, never gives quite the same impression; the strange forces his protagonists encounter, even when destructive, produce a sense of wonder, not horror.) Much of Machen's early writing seems prompted more by his rejection of the visible world than by his belief in a hidden mystical reality, a theme, we know, shared by many Romantics.

In 1899 Machen's first wife died of cancer. Understandably he was crushed. The depression led to a creative block, and Machen gave up writing. He joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, took an extreme dislike to Aleister Crowley, and soon left to take up a new career as an actor. For the next eight years Machen played minor Shakespearian roles in Frank Benson's stage company. Then, in 1909, he

turned to journalism and later, in the 1920s, autobiography. In the 1930s, prompted by financial need, he turned his hand to fiction again, producing a few minor works, but the earlier spark had fled. Ironically, while he felt creatively drained, his early stories were enjoying a vogue in the US. In 1918 Vincent Starret published Arthur Machen: A Novelist of Ecstasy and Sin. Decadence had reached the States and a Machen craze ensued. New editions of his works appeared and he was celebrated by writers like Carl Van Vechten and James Branch Cabell. Machen was dubbed "the flower-tunicked priest of nightmare" and seen as the equal of his beloved Poe and De Quincey. One work in particular was singled out for praise as the "most decadent book in all of English literature." It was Machen's early novel The Hill of Dreams.

Although written in 1897, during Machen's most creative decade, The Hill of Dreams would not find a publisher until 1907. The reason is simple: if not the most decadent book in all of English literature, it's certainly a good candidate; the scenes of self-flagellation alone suggest that. Its ironic that it took a decade to find a publisher: in writing the book, Machen was consciously attempting to fashion a new style. The Three Impostors, a fascinating, if erratic occult adventure, met with even more criticism than The Great God Pan. The book was a commercial failure, and Machen, seen as merely a second-rate. Stevenson, was determined to recreate himself as a writer. Drawing on his own harrowing early days in London, Machen set out to write a "Robinson Crusoe of the soul," a book that would embody the aesthetic philosophy that he would later spell out in his work of literary criticism, Hieroglyphics (1906): the belief that ecstasy, not fidelity to life, was the touchstone of real literature.

Though a slim novel the work took Machen two years to finish, and it's possible that in depicting his own descent into hell through the figure of Lucian Taylor, Machen worked off some of his hatred of modernity. At any rate, the frisson of horror and decadence is less apparent in his later writings, the mystical light less tinted by the demonic. He had, I think, got through some of his world rejection, and in his imagination worked out the fate of an individual who adopts Axel's attitude toward life, yet lacks the spiritual stamina to put something in its place. Like Brother Serapion, Lucian lifts anchor on reality, and embarks on a dream voyage. Unlike Brother Serapion, he found no safe harbour in a monastery and slowly goes under. Increasingly, the qualities that set Lucian apart from other people, his genius and sensitivity, draw him into an underworld of his own dreams, visions and fantasies, until eventually his link with the world is severed. The Hill of Dreams has its roots in The Golden Flower Pot, and depicts a third choice along with the foot of the cross and the barrel of a gun: madness.

Guy De Maupassant

Although known for the most part as a laconic and cynical chronicler of late-19th century French manners, Guy De Maupassant had a lifelong obsession with madness and death. This later emerged in a series of gruesome and disturbing supernatural tales, whose mood is quite unlike that of his more famous stories, like "La Parure" and "Soule-de-suif." Some commentators suggest Maupassant's morbidity started with the mummified hand of a parricide given to him at fourteen by the poet Swinburne. If Swinburne thought it an appropriate gift, however, he must have known Maupassant already had a taste for such items. Maupassant grew up in a household familiar with mental abnormality. His mother suffered from a variety of neurotic and hysterical complaints, and his younger brother Herve had an unstable personality and would eventually die insane. That Maupassant himself would succumb to the same fate suggests that in some way his fascination with madness and premature death was an intuition of what lay ahead.

Guy De Maupassant was born in Chateau de Miromesnil, near Dieppe in Normandy on 5 August 1850. His father, the son of a successful business man, was a handsome amateur painter who had a reputation as a dandy. His mother, a brilliant and strong willed neurotic, was equally well off but more cultivated than her husband. She had an interest in philosophy and literature and was a friend of the novelist Gustave Flaubert, later the young writer's mentor. At Guy's birth the doctor gave his head a vigorous massage, rounding it off like a pot with a twirl of his thumb. This, he said, would ensure an active brain and a first rate-intelligence. Whether it was the doctor's handiwork or not, Guy grew up a very bright little boy. His parent's relationship,

however, was crumbling, and at the age of six, Guy's father left him and his younger brother to be brought up by his mother. Extremely territorial, she would prove to be the strongest influence on his life. In later life Maupassant saw women as things to be enjoyed - he was an obsessive seducer - and his stories have a strong misogynist streak, and often depict the weakness of a negligent father.

At thirteen Maupassant was sent to a seminary near Rouen; here he spent three unhappy years before being expelled. In his teens he came under the influence of the poet Louis Bouillet who introduced him to Flaubert's circle. After finishing at the lycee Maupassant saw service in the FrancoPrussian war and many of his stories depict the cruelty and stupidity he experienced during this time; it was probably then that he developed his lifelong pessimism, corroborated by a reading of Schopenhauer. (He would later write to a friend "On certain days I experience the horror of everything that is . . .") Although writing constantly, under Flaubert's advice Maupassant took a position with the government, working as a clerk in Paris, and refrained from publishing. He earned a precarious living and hated the job, but at same time under the master's tutelage he learned his craft. For the next ten years, Maupassant worked diligently and patiently at his task. Then, in 1880, only a few weeks before Flaubert's death, his first book appeared.

Maupassant's story, "Soule de suif," appeared in the collection Les Soirees de Medan, published under the auspices of Emile Zola. (J.K.Huysmans was also a contributor.) The book was a success and Maupassant's story was singled out as a masterpiece. His introduction to the literary world couldn't have been more different than Arthur Machen's, and almost immediately Maupassant was a bestselling author, with newspapers clamouring for his articles. Maupassant quickly made enough money to build a villa in Rouen; he also bought a house for his mother, and for himself a yacht, on which he spent a good deal of his time sailing.31 A great lover of the physical world - Maupassant in many ways reminds us of Hemingway or Albert Camus - he enjoyed sport, travel and sex. For the next decade he worked at a highly lucrative and well publicized career. Calling himself an industriel des lettres (literature manufacture) he wrote mainly for money, and produced close to three hundred stories, along with six novels, some plays, travel writings, and hundreds of articles. Yet the beginning of his rise also saw the first signs of the malady that would kill him. During a sailing excursion on the Seine, Maupassant contracted syphilis. His doctors, however, didn't recognize this and it went untreated; now the first symptoms began to show. Maupassant's eyes became extremely sensitive, and he took to wearing dark glasses. He complained of "head pains," and took a variety of drugs for relief. For one in particular, ether, he developed a taste, and used it regularly, enjoying its stimulating effects; in a short story, "Reves" ("Dreams"), he describes how under its influence he felt that ,,all mysteries were solved;" his brain "became a battlefield of ideas" and he saw himself "a superior being, armed with an invincible intelligence" and experienced a "fierce joy in the discovery of my power." This sense of a powerful superior being would hover in the background of Maupassant's mind, eventually coalescing into a threatening presence.

Many of Maupassant's horror stories centre on the uncertain borderline between sanity and madness and question our everyday assumptions about reality. The titles themselves suggest this: "Mad?", "Was it a Dream?", "Am I Insane?", "He?", "Who Knows?". Like many occultists, Maupassant was fascinated with the idea that our senses reveal only a fraction of reality; and like R.M. Bucke, Maupassant believed in a superior `coming race', an evolutionary advance that would eventually supplant us. Yet unlike Bucke, Maupassant did not believe that this super race was a future development that would arise out of present humanity, but that it already exists in a dimension or sphere unperceived and hence unknown to us. Superior beings already share the planet, and are preparing our downfall. Where many saw higher space as a region of wonder and insight, Maupassant recognized it as the source of a threat.

The idea that beings exist in a kind of matter or dimension too fine or subtle for our senses to detect is a familiar one in occultism. Bulwer-Lytton discusses it in Zanoni, as does Poe in his `magnetic tales'. Eliphas Levi talked about it in his reflections on astral light and the notion of a fourth dimension found a home in the doctrines of spiritualists. Maupassant was a great reader of Poe as well as of Hoffmann, and he was fascinated by abnormal mental states. In the 1880s he attended the psychiatrist J.M. Charcot's famous lectures at the Salpetriere Hospital (as did Sigmund Freud). Journalists, writers and famous actresses would sit enthralled during Charcot's exhibitions of hypnotism and grande hysterie.32 Maupassant was also

fascinated by Mesmer and mesmerism and mesmerists and magnetism appear in several tales. In "Was He Mad?" the magnetist Jacques Parent is cursed with a kind of telekinetic power, the ability to move objects at a distance, and is forced to conceal his hands lest the strange force operate against his will. In "Magnetism" Maupassant combines his interest in strange forces with his central entertainment, seduction. Here a sceptic explains an apparent precognitive vision leading to a spontaneous erotic encounter as sheer coincidence. For Maupassant, as for Balzac and other earlier Romantics, `magnetism' was a catch-all term for paranormal phenomena, and here Maupassant links it to the more common animal kind. In "Who Knows?," inanimate objects move of their own accord, and the phenomena so shatters the narrator that he puts himself in an asylum, a remarkable intimation of Maupassant's own fate.

Another obsession of Maupassant's was the `double', an `other self who appears in several of his stories. In "He?" a man marries solely in order to avoid solitude; when alone he is plagued by a vision of his doppelganger. Maupassant himself told a friend that, "Every other time I come home, I see my double. I open my door, and I see him sitting in my armchair." Maupassant was known for his practical jokes, and this may have been one of them. But it is also possible that he suffered from external autoscopy, the phenomena of seeing one's body in front of oneself, and that his abuse of ether and other drugs may have been the source of this. In any case, the fear of some other who will take over his life appears in many of Maupassant's weird tales. With the remaining writers in this section - August Strindberg, Gustav Meyrink, and Andrei Bely - we can see Maupassant as a devotee of what we might call psychotic occultism.

Like Strindberg (and many others we've seen), Maupassant believed that madness might not be a pathological condition, but merely an ultrasensitivity to unperceived phenomena. This, in effect, is a standard Romantic and decadent assumption. In an early version of Maupassant's classic story, "The Horla," the narrator of "Letter From a Madman" explains to his doctor that he "was on the verge of discovering a secret of the universe." He has, he tells him "seen an invisible being." The experience was frightening and he "almost died of terror." The being, he is sure, is intent on dominating him, and now he waits for its return ... In the final version of "The Horla," Maupassant uses the device of a diary to depict the slow deterioration of the narrator's will and his eventual path to suicide as the result of his awareness of an invisible creature". The title itself is suggestive: hors means `outside', but is also the first syllable of horrible. "Horla", Maupassant's coinage, may be translated as "the horror - or horrible thing - from outside."34 This tells us that at least for Maupassant's narrator, if not for himself or his readers, the Horla is not a creature of the imagination, but an objective entity, a being that exists in a nature or reality that lies beyond our feeble senses. This "latent world" is the home of the Horla, who is now intent on colonizing our dimension .. .

How much Maupassant's incipient madness can account for these ideas is debatable. After "The Horla" (1887), Maupassant went on to write many other works with no connection to horror or the supernatural. We might also wonder if a diseased mind could be the source of the story: madness is usually not responsible for artistic excellence, and "The Horla" is Maupassant at his best: subtle, controlled, economical. Yet if Maupassant and others in the fin de siecle were correct in their belief that at least part of what we call madness is a sensitivity to the inexplicable, then madness in a way played its part. At any rate, by 1891, Maupassant's mind was deteriorating rapidly. He began to suffer from delusions. He saw his own ghost, fired a pistol at an imaginary assailant, and believed his body had been turned to salt. "I have a softening of the brain," he wrote his friend Dr. Henry Cazalis, ". . . the result of washing out my nasal passages with salt water. A saline fermentation has taken place in my brain, and every night my brain runs out through my noise and mouth in a sticky paste. This is imminent death and I am mad ..." Remembering the fate of his insane brother, Maupassant tried to kill himself, but botched the job and was saved by his servant. He was driven to a sanatorium in Paris in a straitjacket, and nineteen months later he died, raving, a month short of his forty-third birthday.

August Strindberg

The career of the Swedish playwright August Strindberg (1849-1912) shows many parallels with his contemporary Maupassant.35 Both men developed a vivid, economical style and both considered

themselves realists, shunning sentimental idealism in favour of the truth. Both were fascinated by abnormal mental states and, for a period at least, Strindberg, like Maupassant, went insane. Unlike Maupassant, however, Strindberg survived his insanity and may be unique in the history of literature as the only writer to write his way out of madness.

In 1894, after years of painful struggle and almost universal rejection, Strindberg suffered an emotional breakdown that left him incapable of creative work. That Strindberg had reached a dead end isn't surprising. Vilified in his homeland for naturalistic works like Miss Julie and The Father, Strindberg had suffered through two divorces - a third was yet to come - as well as poverty and the loss of his three children from his first marriage. His second marriage, to the Austrian journalist Frida Uhl, had just ended bitterly. This meant estrangement from yet another child and the loss of Frida's considerable dowry. At 45, penniless and alone, that Strindberg might question the point of going on is understandable. But Strindberg had demonic persistence, and after his failure in Sweden and a stint in Berlin, he looked to Paris for a last assault on fame.

By 1893, some of Strindberg's works had already been performed in Paris, but it was more than literary glory that attracted him. Although a founder of naturalism, Strindberg had a deep interest in magic and mysticism and in the 1890s, Paris, as we've seen, was the occult capital of the world. Strindberg was also fascinated with science, and like Goethe before him, Strindberg thought that he too was a scientist. In 1893 he published his first work of speculative natural history, Antibarbarus, "Anti-barbarian," the man of genius against the academic plodders. Goethe set his own theory of colour against Isaac Newton's, and Strindberg too believed that his poet's eye saw more deeply than that of the professors. Also like Goethe, when it came to the occult, Strindberg's central interest was alchemy.

By 1894, there were an estimated 50,000 alchemists in Paris. Undoubtedly, between 1894 and 1896, Strindberg experienced a schizophrenic episode, but it's just possible that the weird phenomena he recounts in his obsessive record Inferno - based, in part, on his even more bizarre Occult Diary - didn't originate solely in a mental breakdown. Without doubt, all the ingredients of paranoid schizophrenia are there, abetted in part by Strindberg's taste for absinthe. But the strange events that make up Strindberg's Inferno are precisely the sort that fuelled one of the burning questions of the age: the thin line between genius and madness.

Throughout his career, Strindberg had periodic bouts of revulsion against literature. His artistic credo practically ensured this. "I regard it as my dreadful duty to be truthful," he wrote, "and life is indescribably ugly," a statement echoing Maupassant's grim pessimism. Such sentiments prompted his devotion to alchemy. It may seem strange that, considering himself a scientist, Strindberg chose alchemy as his path to immortality. But Strindberg's approach to science was anything but orthodox. His aim in Antibarbarus was to explain the nature of sulphur, the transmutation of carbon and other elements, and the composition of water and air. Claiming to be a "transformist" like Darwin and a monist like the German naturalist Ernst Haskell, Strindberg declared "I have committed myself to the assumption that all elements and all forces are related. And if they derive from one source, then they sprang into existence by means of condensation and attenuation, of copulation and crossbreeding, of heredity and transformation ... and whatever else one cares to suggest."

When the book appeared, Strindberg's pretensions were dismissed as a sign of monomania, its author lambasted for his lack of logic and incapacity for experiment. But for the alchemist, transformation is the key, and Strindberg's speculative approach is in the great magical tradition. Writing to his young botanist friend Bengt Lidforss, Strindberg said "I doubt all experiments ... I believe rather in the depth of my conscious thought, or more correctly, my unconscious thought ..." His method was to put himself "into a state of unconsciousness, not with drink, but by distractions, games, cards, sleep, novels ... without bothering about results, or acceptability, and something emerges that I can believe in...

Strindberg's science was right in line with the latest developments in art.36 Earlier Strindberg had published an essay on "The New Arts, or the Role of Chance in Artistic Creation." This, along with another article on "Deranged Sense Impressions," deals with the curious power of the mind to alter its perceptions, to re-

create reality. Like many other artists, Strindberg rebelled against the neat objective universe revealed by an increasingly triumphant rationalist science. He argued instead for a world open to strange forces, and the influence of consciousness itself, a position made commonplace decades later with the rise of quantum physics. In "The New Arts" he describes the "oscillations of his sense impressions," and recounts how, seen from a certain angle, a cow becomes two peasants embracing each other, then a tree trunk, and then something else, and how the figures at a picnic are really a ploughman's coat and knapsack thrown over his cart ... Strindberg would later describe his own method of writing as something like a trance state. His considerable absinthe intake surely had a hand in this. Nevertheless, by the next century, with Dada and surrealism, the notion that reality is plastic, and that consciousness and chance affect what we experience, would become commonplace in aesthetic theory.

But Strindberg was interested in more than a new approach to art. He took his alchemy seriously and soon after his arrival in Paris, he turned his back on the literary world and got to work on the archetypal alchemical project: making gold. From what we can gather from Inferno, we can see that, at least to his own satisfaction, he succeeded.

A pharmacist who took an interest in his pursuits allowed Strindberg to work in his laboratory. He sent the results to a firm of chemists to be analyzed. Their tests proved positive. Other encouragement followed. A summary of Strindberg's scientific work appeared in Le Petit Temps, followed by long articles on `Strindberg the scientist' in La Science Francaise and the widely read Le Figaro. Strindberg petitioned to conduct further experiments using the laboratory at the Sorbonne. The faculty thought little of his work, but granted him permission. An engineer at a chemical factory who read of his experiments wrote to him saying that they threw light on "hitherto unexplained phenomena in the manufacture of sulphuric acid and sulphides." At the same time, a correspondence with the distinguished chemist Marcellin Berthelot suggested to Strindberg he was on the right track.

It was around this time that Strindberg came into contact with the Parisian alchemical underground. Francois Jollivet- Castelot, whose book Strindberg had read with enthusiasm, had heard of Strindberg's work, and approached him.Jollivet- Castelot later became editor of an alchemical journal, L'Hyperchimie, and published Strindberg's account of his alchemical work, "The Synthesis of Gold." Strindberg's alchemical celebrity was assured when Gerard Encausse - better known under his occult pseudonym Papus - published an account of his work in his periodical L'Initiation. "August Strindberg," Papus wrote, "who combines vast knowledge with his great talent as a writer, has just achieved a synthesis of gold from iron." His work, Papus continued, "confirms all the assertions of the alchemists.""

This was high praise. The author of several influential works, as the leader of the Groupe Independant d'Etudes Eso- terique and Grand Master of the Martinist Order, Papus was a powerful figure in the Parisian occult underground. He was also indirectly involved in the magical feud that had Huysmans, Sar Peladan and De Guaita casting spells at each other. When Papus elected Strindberg an honorary Master of La Societe Alchimique de France, it's understandable the accolade went to his head. After years of obscurity, rejection and accusations of madness, to be accepted as a genius by men whose intelligence he respected, must have given Strindberg some satisfaction.

Yet his alchemical adventure wasn't purely benign. Nurtured by his occult obsessions, Strindberg's deranged sense impressions began to get out of hand. More and more he recognized in them the sign of an occult intelligence which he called "the Powers" and "the Unseen," a somewhat more benign, though still disturbing version of Maupassant's invisible superior being.

He began to feel that he was being tested. He talked to the Powers, thanked them, asked them for advice. He saw their work everywhere. Money appeared miraculously, allowing him to buy scientific instruments. Observing the embryo of a walnut under a microscope, Strindberg was convinced he could see two tiny hands, clasped in prayer, emerging from the seed. On a chance trip to the country, his deranged sense impressions transformed a stone into a statue of a Roman knight. Pleased with this effect, he looked in the direction the statue was pointing. On a wall he saw the initials F and S. He first thought of his second wife, Frida Strindberg. But then he realized that it was really the chemical symbols for iron and sulphur (Fe and

S), the ingredients, he believed, for alchemical gold. A crumpled pillow became a Michelangelo bust, then a likeness of the Devil. A shadow in his room became a statue of Zeus. He had precognitive dreams. A dead friend appeared, offering a large American coin. When Strindberg reached for it, the friend disappeared. The next morning he received a letter from America. Arriving months late, it informed him of an offer of 12,000 francs to write a piece for the Chicago Exhibition. But the deadline had passed, and the money, a fortune for Strindberg, was now lost.

A host of strange simulacra followed. In the zinc bath he used for making gold by the wet method, he saw a remarkable landscape. Formed by the evaporation of salts of iron, Strindberg saw "small hills covered with conifers ... plains, with orchards and cornfields ... a river ... the ruins of a castle." It was only months later, during a visit to his daughter, who he hadn't seen for two years, that he recognized his vision as the landscape around his mother-in-law's house. Making gold by the dry method produced its own terrors. After melting borax in terrific heat, he found a skull with two glistening eyes. On another occasion a chunk of charred coal revealed a bizarre formation: a body with a cock's head, a human trunk, and distorted limbs. It looked, he remarked, "like one of the demons that used to perform in the witches' sabbaths of the Middle Ages."

A reading of Balzac's Seraphita convinced Strindberg that his alchemical experiments were unholy, and that for his salvation, the Powers had consigned him to Hell. Strindberg was high-strung and thin-skinned; some of his tortures seem more like inconveniences than anything else. But some are more in line with the magical adventures familiar to the time. Strindberg began to feel there was an occult conspiracy against him, and he was convinced someone was spying on his alchemical activities. The sound of pianos playing eerie, disturbing music followed him everywhere. He believed the Polish decadent writer Stanislav Przybyszewski had come from Berlin to kill him. A persecution complex developed. His supersensitive nerves detected strange subterranean vibrations. The idea that he was the target of evil emanations obsessed him. Baffling coincidences appeared everywhere. Mysterious noises from the rooms next door tormented him, and he was convinced that someone was trying to kill him using an electrical machine. He walked around Paris in a state of tense expectancy, awaiting "an eruption, an earthquake, or a thunderbolt." Friends and acquaintances now became demons, sent by the Powers to show him the error of his ways, and each night he suffered anxiety attacks. Because he had rejected the teachings of Madame Blavatsky, for some time he was convinced his assailants were a group of theosophists .. .

Eventually Strindberg passed through his ordeal, convinced the Powers had tested him to aid his spiritual evolution. By 1897, his interest in alchemy abated, and the urge to write had returned, one product of which was Inferno. In 1898 he began work on To Damascus, perhaps his greatest play. His belief in the Powers, however, remained for the rest of his life, and he went on to write several more masterpieces, including the expressionistic A Dream Play (1902). In 1912 he was diagnosed with a stomach cancer and died a few months later, a Bible on his chest.

Gustav Meyrink

In 1891, at the age of 23, Gustav Meyer (he later adopted Meyrink as a nom de plume then took it as his legal name) was a successful, if unorthodox banker. A dandy, man-about-town and owner of the first automobile in Prague, Meyer had a reputation as a fin de siecle decadent, a sophisticated pleasure seeker, as well as an astute financier. The bank he started with a nephew of the poet Christian Morgenstern - a devotee of Rudolf Steiner - was a success and Meyer was living the high life. Yet although Meyer presented an extraverted personality to the world, he was by nature a sensitive introvert, poetic and contemplative. The tension between his two selves grew too great and the young aesthete suffered a nervous collapse, a complete breakdown that had him on the brink of suicide. Just as he was about to kill himself, a leaflet was pushed under the door of his flat. Meyer stopped and picked it up. It was an advertisement for a book on occultism. Meyer concluded that fate had intervened and he quickly plunged into a study of the arcane arts, becoming soon after a founding member of the Theosophical Lodge of the Blue Star, the first theosophical organization in Prague.

Ten years later Meyer met another fateful crossroads. While convalescing in a tuberculosis sanatorium, he wrote his first story, "The Ardent Soldier." Legend has it that, like many other unsolicited submissions, it quickly found a place in the waste basket of the editorial offices of Simplicissimus, the satirical magazine Meyer had sent it to. Meyer might never have become Meyrink if Ludwig Thoma, the editor, did not idly poke around with his umbrella in the trash, and puncture Meyer's manuscript. Drawing out his catch, Thoma allegedly recognized it as a work of genius and published it. Soon after Meyrink became a regular contributor, his satirical wit infuriating various members of the establishment. Two years later his first collection of stories was published, and Meyrink had established himself as a writer. Meyrink's taste for the occult gave his tales a peculiar atmosphere, a strange, visionary quality that would fully emerge in his first novel, The Golem. Originally published in 1913 in Die Weissen Blatter, when it appeared in book form two years later it quickly sold 200,000 copies". The book made Meyrink famous and rich. Like Rainer Maria Rilke and Franz Kafka, two of Meyrink's contemporaries, Meyrink is one of the poets of Prague. If today Kafka's name prompts visions of a dark, ambiguous and threatening Central European city, it should be remembered that in his own day, it was Meyrink who was most associated with this literary effect. Prague had a history of occultism and alchemy going back to the early 1600s, and in his first novel Meyrink managed to condense this into an atmosphere thick with tension, chills and high melodrama, producing a work that is at once a thriller and a metaphysical exploration.

A great deal happened to Meyrink while he was on his way to becoming a bestselling. novelist. It's a cliche to say about some writers that their lives were stranger than their fiction. In Meyrink's case it's true. Gustav was born in 1868, the illegitimate son of a Jewish actress, Maria Meyer, and an aristocrat, Baron Karl Varnbiiler von and zu Hemmingen, minister of state for Wurttemburg. Marriage was out of the question, but the Baron proved generous and paid for Gustav's education, first in Munich, then Hamburg, and, finally, Prague; he later established a trust fund for his son, which allowed Gustav to set himself up as a banker. At some point in childhood his mother left him, and a sense of abandonment and loss of identity often figure in his novels. This is true of The Golem, as well as later works like The Green Face (1916), Walpurgisnacht (1917), The White Dominican (1921) and his last novel, The Angel of the West Window (1927), which features the Elizabethan magician John Dee. The feeling of being an `outsider' remained with Meyrink throughout his life.

In 1892 Meyrink married; the marriage, however, was not a success and in 1895 he met Philomena Bernt, who later became his second wife. The scandal surrounding their affair added to the stress of his unhappy marriage; at the same time, Meyrink's occult investigations had begun, and he busied himself with yoga, freemasonry, alchemy, as well as experiments with hashish and mescaline. It was during this time that Meyrink became a member of several occult organizations. Along with the Lodge of the Blue Star, Meyer also became an Arch Censor in the Mandala of the Lord of the Perfect Circle. Other societies included The Order of Illumination, and the Brotherhood of the Old Rite of the Holy Grail in the Great Orient of Patmos. In his short story "What's the Use of White Dog Shit?" Meyrink even satirized himself and has his narrator remark that "the next thing I did was to immerse myself in the study of the history of secret societies. There can't be a single fraternity left that I haven't joined ..." Later Meyrink would be associated with the German guru Bo Yin Ra, correspond at length with Annie Besant, and receive praise from Rudolf Steiner 39, as well as be seen by many as an esoteric master in his own right. A sceptical occultist, Meyrink's wit and critical acumen are welcome in a field too littered with credulity and self-deception.

The stress of Meyrink's life took its toll and he suffered the collapse that led to the sanatorium. When he recovered he faced yet another challenge. Talk of his affair with Philomena Bernt led to insults, and Meyrink was obliged to challenge two army officers to a duel. Fearing his skill with a blade, they refused, claiming his illegitimacy prevented him from getting satisfaction. Meyrink then challenged the entire officers' corp. In the same year Meyrink was accused of using occult powers to influence his business clients, particularly the female ones, and criminal charges were brought against him. Although the charges were eventually dropped, he spent three months in jail, during which time he became temporarily paralysed, possibly through rough treatment by the guards. He later claimed his yogic practices cured him. When he was finally let out his bank was ruined, and Meyrink was penniless. Obliged to make his living by his pen, Meyrink

supplemented his income by working for a time as a representative of a champagne distributor, a position he more than likely enjoyed.

In 1904 scandal and social ostracism led Meyrink to leave Prague and move to Vienna. His stay there was short and in 1906 he moved to Bavaria, after finally divorcing his first wife and marrying Philomena. But it wasn't until 1911 that he finally settled by Lake Starnberg in a place he called the House of the Last Lamps. Here he would write The Golem and his other novels, and live until his death in 1932. By this time his celebrity had passed and in his last years ill health forced him to stop writing. Although The Golem has a large cast of weird and eccentric characters - the trademark of all Meyrink's novels - the central star is Prague itself, especially the old Jewish ghetto. Meyrink's portrayal of its sunless, narrow streets and eerie, jutting architecture lent itself to the Expressionist cinema then in its infancy. Evidence for this can be found in Paul Wegner's two film versions of The Golem as well as in the classic Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.

Meyrink discovered the legend of the Golem in his reading of Hebrew mysticism. There are variations of the story but in its basics, the Golem is an inanimate man-like creature, usually made of clay, that is brought to life by a rabbi or kabbalist. By placing the word EMETH - life - on its forehead, the Golem is awakened, ready to do the bidding of its master. Generally, some variation of the Sorcerer's Apprentice happens, and the Golem, like any good Frankenstein's monster, gets out of control. He can be stopped only by rubbing out the initial E, leaving the word METH, death, on its brow.

That a novelist would find a magical creature susceptible to the power of words interesting is not surprising. In Meyrink's novel, however, the Golem as such makes no appearance. Rather Meyrink uses the name to refer to something much more like a mobile state of consciousness, a kind of psychic fog, that is somehow linked to the book's protagonist. Like Meyrink, Athanasius Pernath comes from an ambiguous background, and throughout the book the reader is unsure if the Golem is an actual entity, or a figment of Pernath's imagination. To complicate matters further, Pernath himself is unsure as well. And by the end of the novel, just exactly who, or what, Pernath is, becomes a disturbing question .. .

In Old Testament Hebrew Golem means an unformed embryo, and in medieval Jewish philosophy it was linked to the word hyle, which means matter without form - a microcosmic version of the chaos and dark night before creation. Until he finds himself Pernath, too, is a kind of Golem, and the dark corners and doorless rooms he traverses may be seen as the crooked path of his 'individuation'. Yet the same may be said for the work of the artist, whose idea remains in mere potentia until given shape through the creative act. Like many others in the early modern period, Meyrink was fascinated by the act of writing, and against his weird, melodramatic backdrop he has in many ways fashioned a tale of how a 'dark, dim intuition finds a vivid, effective expression.

When Meyrink began writing The Golem, the idea of a World War was, if not unthinkable, at least not often thought. By 1915 when the novel appeared on the bookstalls, Europe was suffering a murderous collapse that would continue for another three years. Meyrink was not the only artist to have glimpsed the shadow that the coming First World War threw before it; like many others, he believed that European bourgeois civilization was so rotten that only an apocalypse could redeem it, could raze its hypocrisy-ridden landscape and make way for a new world. The same theme appears in his second novel, The Green Face, as well as Walpurgisnacht, his third. In The Golem it is the Jewish Ghetto that is destroyed, but Meyrink knew that was only the beginning. Through his occult explorations, he had seen an ideal world, a realm of the spirit of which this physical shell was but a shadow. Now it was time for that shell to crack. The Golem, Meyrink believed, was one of the means to perform this deed, and it is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that by 1918 it had once again got out of hand.

Andrei Bely

Of all the esoteric transplants to take root in fin de siecle Russia, none was as successful as anthroposophy, the unwieldy name Rudolf Steiner gave to his Christianized revision of Madame Blavatsky's theosophy.41'

Along with steering away from Blavatsky's Tibetan masters and toward a more western form of esotericism, Steiner introduced a strong element of German philosophical rigour into Blavatsky's occult speculations. Born in 1861 in Kraljevec - then part of the Austro- Hungarian empire - Steiner first made his name as a Goethe scholar: as a young man he edited the great poet's scientific writings. He was later briefly involved in the Nietzsche archive started by the philosopher's sister, Elizabeth ForsterNietzsche, in Weimar. Elizabeth, widow of a pan-Germanic anti-semite - and later an acquaintance of Adolf Hitler - hired Steiner to help organize her brother's notes, as well as to tutor her in the more abstruse elements of his philosophy: perhaps not surprisingly, Elizabeth was notoriously ignorant of her brother's, or anyone else's, ideas. During his brief tenure, Steiner had an opportunity to meet Nietzsche - if occupying the same room as the insane philosopher counts as meeting him - and had a paranormal vision of his astral form. Elizabeth at that time was dressing her defenceless brother in a toga, and positioning him by the window, where his blank immobile stare, massive moustache and unkempt hair provided the impression of a great prophet, peering into the beyond. He was riddled with syphilis and by 1900 was dead.

In 1897 Steiner moved to Berlin where he briefly edited a literary magazine. He then taught at the Berlin Worker's School, where he managed to transmit to his Marxist audience a fair amount of German Idealism. This erratic pattern took an even more eccentric turn when Steiner was asked by the Berlin Theosophical Society to lecture on Goethe's Mdrehen, "The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily." The lecture was so successful that he was invited back, and it was Steiner's lecture on "Christianity as Mystical Fact" in the winter of 1900 that more or less set him on his future career: previously kept from view, he now displayed his esoteric interests openly. In the audience that evening was the woman who would become Steiner's second wife, Marie von Sivers, a Baltic Russian, frustrated actress, and devout theosophist.41 Forceful and ambitious, von Sivers had already made a place for herself by translating the playwright and Wagnerian Eduorad Schure's esoteric bestseller The Great Initiates (1889). In 1902 she accompanied Steiner (who was still married to his first wife) to the London Conference of the Theosophical Society. Reports have. it that during this trip she suggested that Europe was in need of a new religious movement and that he, Rudolf Steiner, should lead it. Steiner agreed and soon after became the Secretary General of the German Branch of the Theosophical Society, second only to Annie Besant in authority and thought by many to be the most brilliant esoteric thinker of the time.

Steiner's break with theosophy was prompted by Besant's and C.W. Leadbeater's attempt to launch the twelve year old Krishnamurti as the new Jesus Christ. Before this, Marie von Sivers had arranged for Steiner to give a series of lectures in Russia, knowing that his highly Christianized theosophy would go down well with the growing number of "Godseekers" turning up among the intelligentsia. The 1905 Revolution, however, spoiled these plans, and sent many of the seekers into exile. It was then arranged for Steiner to give his lectures in the exile capital of Europe, Paris, in 1906. Among the audience were many of the most influential figures in the Russian cultural Renaissance: Dimitri Merzhkovsky, Zinaida Hippius, Konstantin Balmont (friend of Briusov) and Nicolai Minsky. By 1913, when Steiner gave a series of lectures at Helsingfors specifically for his Russian followers, there were already several anthroposophical discussion groups and workshops in St. Petersburg and Moscow.

In Steiner's esoteric system, the Slavic folk-soul has an important and timely role to play. Russia, he believed, was the country most suited to embody a new cultural epoch, something that many of the new mystically inclined intelligentsia believed as well. The Russian soul, Steiner told them, would transcend both the rational-materialist west and the mystical-spiritual east, inaugurating a new, holistic consciousness, that would synthesize these opposites. Oddly, many of Steiner's pronouncements on the Slavic soul echo Hermann Hesse's remarks on `Russian Man'. The Russian, Steiner said, was a "child." "In the Russian way of thinking, two opposing concepts can hold sway simultaneously." "The Russian does not have the slightest understanding of what Westerners call `reasonableness'." Madame Blavatsky, Steiner said, was a typical Russian: she went to extremes, did not think logically, and was childlike. Yet it was precisely these qualities that allowed her to intuit deep, spiritual truths ... sometimes.

Steiner's message hit home, although not all among the intelligentsia thought well of him. For the philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev, anthroposophy had a "distinctly corrupting and disintegrating effect."

Berdyaev, who attended Steiner's Helsingfors lectures, was not impressed, and saw in Steiner a kind of black magician, casting a spell upon his audience. His followers seemed "maniacs possessed by some power beyond their control." "Whenever they uttered the magic words `the Doctor (i.e. Steiner) said', they seemed to be seized by some demon ..." Berdyaev was also very wary of a certain Anna Mintslova, whom he called Steiner's emissary, "an ugly, fat woman with protruding eyes" who bore a likeness to Madame Blavatsky. Mintslova "was skilled in her approach to human souls," and her influence was "absolutely negative and demonic." It is even possible that she performed some kind of magic spell or remote hypnosis on Berdyaev. He recounts how one night, half asleep, he saw her face hovering in a corner of his room, "its expression was quite horrifying - a face seemingly possessed of all the powers of darkness." Berdyaev also remarks on her strange disappearance, fading into thin air one afternoon on the Kuznetsky Bridge in Moscow. Rumours said she had gone into hiding in a Rosicrucian monastery, or, conversely, had committed suicide because the Doctor had condemned her for failing in her mission to convert the Slavs ..."

One writer to fall under Steiner's spell was the novelist, poet, and essayist Andrei Bely. Born Boris Nikolaevich Bugaev in Moscow in 1880 (Andrei Bely was a pseudonym, meaning `Andrew White'), Bely was the son of a worldfamous mathematician and a St. Petersburg society lady. Prompted by his father, Bely entered the mathematics faculty at Moscow University, and graduated in 1903. By that time, Bely's feeling for mathematics had changed; through music, which he called "audible mathematics," he became fascinated with art and aesthetic expression. Already at 17 Boris had been writing poems in the manner of Heine, Verlaine and Maeterlinck; now he became Andrei Bely, adopting the pseudonym to avoid embarrassing his renowned father.

Bely was a voracious reader and his favourite pastime seems to have been absorbing philosophical systems and turning them into writing. He was infatuated with Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Kant, theosophy, eastern religions and was a follower of the Russian religious philosopher Vladimir Soloviev.43 From Soloviev, whose philosophy influenced the Russian Renaissance, Bely absorbed the idea, common to his generation, of a transcendental reality, intuited through symbols. He also absorbed the belief that the current age was at an end and that Russia was about to become the backdrop for a cataclysmic upheaval.44 Bely first came to literary notice with his eccentric prose work Second Symphony (1902), which applied the principles of musical composition to writing. Neither a novel, essay nor poem, Bely composed three further Symphonies, before embarking on his first novel, The Silver Dove (1909). Like Arthur Machen, Bely was obsessed with the clash between western European consciousness and primitive beliefs; in the novel the Moscow poet Daryalsky is tired of the intelligentsia and leaves the city for the countryside, where he joins a mystical sect, the White Doves. Here, under the dominance of their ruthless leader, who, Bely claims, anticipates the real life Rasputin, he is drawn into a disastrous union with the "Mother of God," in an attempt to produce a magical offspring. The novel was well received - in his review Berdyaev wrote that "Modern Russia has produced nothing greater" - and with Valery Briusov, Bely had established himself as a leader of the new Symbolist movement.

In 1910-1911 Bely and his first wife, Asya Turgenev (niece of the writer) travelled in Italy, North Africa and the Holy Land. Then, in the spring of 1912, Bely met Steiner and became part of his entourage, eventually leaving Russia for Dornach, Switzerland, where he helped build Steiner's Goetheanum, a strangely beautiful work of Expressionist and Art Nouveau architecture.45 Although critical of some Stein- erites, Bely found striking parallels between his own ideas and those of anthroposophy. In a letter to the poet Aleksander Blok - with whose wife Bely had been infatuated - Bely remarked that "Since the autumn of 1911, Steiner has begun to speak of ... Russia, her future, the soul of her people and Soloviev ... He considers Soloviev to be the most remarkable man of the second half of the nineteenth century, knows the Mongol peril, asserts that since 1900 an enormous change has taken place in the world and that the sunsets have changed since that year ..

Mention of the "Mongol peril" brings us to one of Bely's obsessions: the belief that Russia was threatened on two fronts, by an incursion of Asiatic hordes from the east and by the success of western rationalism and technology, which was absorbing the authentic Slav soul. This concern, often amounting to hysteria, saturates Bely's most well known work, the novel Petersburg (1916). Along with a later novel, the

autobiographical Kotik Letayev (1922), begun during his time in Dornach, it is the most anthroposophical of Bely's creative writing.

Taking place in the days leading up to the 1905 Revolution, the plot centres around the radical student Nikolai Ableukhov and his father, a senator condemned to death by the revolutionary tribunal. Nikolai is given the task of carrying out the sentence, and he does this by the means of a bomb hidden in a sardine tin. This almost comical situation takes place amidst a feverish landscape of secret agents, premonitions, strange dreams and astral journeys, made even more ambiguous through Bely's eccentric syntax. Through it all the initiated reader can find Bely's absorption of Steiner's teaching. Nikolai undergoes an astral voyage during sleep, in which he sees his father as the pagan god Saturn. In Steiner's system, Saturn was the first stage in the evolution of human and cosmic consciousness. The dreaded Mongol appears as well, along with the "old Turanian." Turanians were non-Semitic, non-Aryan nomads who supposedly came to Europe well before the Aryans. In Steiner's system, they are linked with the Mongols, and are responsible for inventing logical reasoning.

Bely was particularly impressed with a series of secret lectures that Steiner gave in 1912-1913, centred around the `activation of the etheric body'. The `etheric body' is a term Steiner took from theosophy; it refers to a kind of `life field' that animates our physical form; living things rot after death because their etheric body has disengaged from the merely physical form and no longer supports it. Steiner taught that when one begins to sense the etheric body, the feeling is like a sudden expansion into space. "He experiences terror; here no one is spared anxiety; it oppresses the soul; as though one had been hurled into space ..."47 In a chapter called "The Senator's Second Space" Bely describes the weird hypnagogic visions Nikolai's father has on the point of sleep. "This universe always appeared before he fell asleep; and appeared in such a way that Apollon Apollonovich, going to sleep, remembered all the earlier inarticulacies, rustlings, crystallographic figures, the golden, chrysanthemum-shaped stars racing through the darkness . . .s48 And in the section entitled "The Last Judgement," Nikolai also finds himself thrown out into strange cosmic depths.

There is an hallucinatory flavour to the book, and reading it in long sittings certainly gives the impression of entering another reality. How much Bely himself experienced of similar states, and how much he assimilated from his enormous reading, is unclear. That he was an unstable character is suggested by reports about him. Berdyaev, who knew him well for a time, believed that Bely lived "by a passionate desire to lose his identity altogether," and spoke of his "monstrous disloyalty and treachery." Although undoubtedly brilliant, it was, he said "impossible to rely on Bely in any way whatsoever." He was also something of a "maniac", obsessed by fears, apprehensions, horrors and premonitions, and had a peculiar terror of meeting a Japanese or Chinese.49 Yevgeny Zamyatin, author of the classic dystopian novel We (1924) remarked of Bely that "He always left one with the impression of impetuosity, flight, feverish excitement" and summed up his character as "Mathematics, poetry, anthroposophy, fox trot . . ." Bely's own relationship with Steiner went through radical fluctuations. In 1916 he left Dornach and returned to Russia, but Asya Turgenev refused to follow him, choosing to remain with the Doctor.50 A period of disillusionment followed, and Bely publicly repudiated Steiner's work. Then, after enduring severe hardship during the revolution, he returned to Dornach, but was rejected by both Aysa and Steiner. He then spent two depressing years in Berlin, returning to Russia in 1923, where he-married another anthroposophist, Klavdia Vasilyeva, and wrote a series of autobiographical works, one of which, Recollections of Steiner (not published until 1982), paints an idealized portrait of Steiner. Although at first enthusiastic about the Bolsheviks, Bely soon realized that any dreams of a spiritual revolution had been quickly jettisoned, and. unlike his one-time mentor Briusov, he never found a place within the new Soviet machine. He died, a somewhat forgotten figure, in 1934. Petersburg, however, remains a classic, a recognized masterpiece, and one of the great works of high modernism thoroughly drenched in esoteric thought.

Notes

1 Maugham's hero, Larry Darrel, is said to be based on Christopher Isherwood, who became a student of

the yogi Prabha- vananda in California in the 1930s.

2 There's reason to suspect that the Ana, Bulwer Lytton's name for his subterranean super-race, influenced Bernard Shaw's late Lamarckian `metabiological Pentateuch', Back to Methuselah. Both works present a superior civilization of mental supermen, who have given up the delights of the flesh in favour of a life devoted solely to the mind. The fact that in his novels Bulwer Lytton often associates the `superior type' with the social out cast - a reflection of his own experience - also has resonances with Shaw, who thought of himself as the complete outsider and who agreed with Nietzsche that the higher evolutionary type would find him or herself beyond good and evil.

3 See Stapledon's First and Last Man and Starmaker, and the stories making up Lovecraft's `Cthulhu Mythos'.

4 W.B. Yeats, Preface to H.P.R Finberg's 1924 translation of Axel (London: Jarrods,1925).

5 H.G. Wells The Food of the Gods (New York: Airmont Publishing Company, 1965) pp. 189-190.

6 The superman theme would spawn hundreds, maybe thousands of offspring in the fields of sci-fi. Olaf Stapledon's Odd John, A.E. Van Vogt's Slan, Theodore Sturgeon's More Than Human, Arthur C. Clarke's Childhood's End, and Robert Heinlein's Stranger in a Strange Land are only some of the most well known efforts in this area.

7 The novelist and playwright J.B. Priestley, who read the memorial address following Wells' cremation at Golders Green on 16 August 1946, was another, more unequivocal advocate of Dunne's ideas, as he was of the ideas of P.D. Ouspensky.

8 To date there is only one full scale book on Blackwood, Mike Ashley's Starlight Man: The Extraordinary Life of Algernon Blackwood (London: Constable, 2001). S.T. Joshi's The Weird Tale (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press) has a long and exhaustive study of Blackwood's work. I have relied on both for the present section.

9 As late as 1962, Gerald Gough, librarian of the Society of Inner Light, a Golden Dawn offshoot started by the occult psychologist Dion Fortune (Violet Firth), tried to contact Blackwood in a seance. Among others present was the late poet and Blake scholar Kathleen Raine. Although Blackwood himself was a firm believer in reincarnation, he didn't think that the soul remained intact after death and was disparaging about spiritualism. His own belief was that the individual soul merged back into a kind of collective cosmic mind, from which new souls emerged. These may inherit qualities from the souls that have passed - i.e., reincarnation.

10 Strangely, Machen and Blackwood were linked by more than magic. Along with gaining mastery of the Golden Dawn, A.E. Waite spent his time as the London manager for Horlick's malted milk company. (Blackwood, we remember, tried his hand at a career in powdered milk.) In 1903, persuaded by Waite, the company issued a popular magazine, The Horlick's Magazine and Home Journal, which ran for eighteen issues. Along with Waite's own contributions were those of Evelyn Underhill (writer on mysticism and member of the Golden Dawn), Edgar Jepson, and Machen, most notably his story "The White People."

11 Along with other thinkers, like William James and Nietzsche, Ouspensky's book owes a considerable debt to the mathematician Charles H. Hinton. At the turn of the nineteenth century, in a series of successful books and magazine articles, Hinton popularized the notion of a `fourth dimension,' running parallel to our usual three. His work also influenced H.G. Wells, who borrowed the idea for his first novel, The Time Machine. For more on Hinton and Ouspensky, see my A Secret History of Consciousness (Massachusetts: Lindisfarne 2003).

12 In The Glittering Gate (1914), Dunsany has two burglars breaking into Heaven. After picking the lock on the entrance, they discover nothing but an abyss. "Stars. Blooming great stars. There ain't no heaven ... " one declares.

13 Mark Amory Biography of Lord Dunsany (London: Collins, 1972) p. 46.

14 Ibid p. 47.

15 Ibid. p.72.

16 Disquietingly, Bucke's psychiatric practice included procedures we would today find unacceptable. Early in his career, endorsing the Victorian belief that masturbation promotes mental disability, Bucke briefly instituted the precedent of `wiring' the penis to prevent his male patients from abusing themselves. The results were equivocal and the practice soon abandoned. Later, he practiced gynaecological surgery as a treatment for insanity in women, again with debatable results. His notions, savage to us, were in keeping with the interest in endocrinology popular at the time, and were prompted by a recognized need for more active methods of treating mental illness. Bucke later abandoned surgery and in his last years developed plans for a self-sufficient therapeutic community, an idea years ahead of its time. For Bucke's contribution to psychiatry see Peter A. Rechnitzer, R.M. Bucke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

17 R.M. Bucke Cosmic Consciousness (New York: Dutton, 1966) pp. 9-10.

18 Sharon Begley, "Religion and the Brain," Newsweek, May 14, 2001.

19 For more on Gavin Arthur, see my Turn Off Your Mind: The Mystic Sixties and the Dark Side of the Age of Aquarius. (London: Macmillan, 2001) pp. 337-340.

20 Bucke p. 4.

21 Outside of occult circles, Ouspensky's name occasionally turns up in books on popular mathematical science, which often perpetuate the error that he was a mathematician himself. Although he had an interest in mathematics, as did his father, Ouspensky himself was not a professional mathematician; indeed he never held a university position of any kind, and was what we would call a drop out. His speculations on higher space, however, have earned him an infrequent mention, sometimes with unintentionally humorous results. Thus, in Hyperspace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 65-67) the physicist Michio Kaku remarks on Ouspensky's profound interest in multidimensional space, and the influence his ideas had on writers like Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Given that Dostoyevsky died in 1881, when Ouspensky was six years old, his influence must have been great indeed. Yet, as Ouspensky himself had some unusual theories about time, we cannot entirely rule out the possibility that Dostoyevsky was influenced by Ouspensky. Part of Ouspensky's strange ideas about `eternal recurrence' included an unusual variant on reincarnation, in which upon death, a person incarnates again, but in the past, not the future. So, granting Ouspensky's peculiar views, he may, upon his death in 1947, have reincarnated into Dostoyevsky's time, and thus had upon the novelist the influence Michio Kaku so generously ascribes to him. Eternal recurrence was a central theme of Nietzsche, whose ideas influenced Ouspensky greatly.

22 Although J.B. Priestley would have like to, he was never able to arrange a meeting with Ouspensky, for the basic reason that Ouspensky rejected the idea. Nevertheless, in his plays Time and the Conways and I Have Been Here Before, as well as in books like Man and Time and his last, Over the Long, High Wall, Priestley made use of and popularized Ouspensky's ideas - always, as Ouspensky had done with Gurdjieff, acknowledging their originator and source. It is unfortunate, in my view at least, that post-Gurdjieff Ouspensky seemed to have developed a powerful anti-social attitude, sometimes bordering on paranoia. Had he made the gesture and met with Priestley, his last days may not have been so tragic; indeed, they might not have been his last days at all.

23 He also believed that the name most suited to becoming famous with was one with a dactyl followed by a trochee, such as Benjamin Franklin.

24 Books about Crowley are numerous. The best remains John Symonds' The Great Beast (1951), most recently revised and reissued as The King of the Shadow Realms, Aleister Crowley his Life and Magic (1989). A more recent account is Martin Booth's A Magick Life (2000). For a life of Crowley from the point of view of a devotee, see Israel Regardie's The Eye in the Triangle (1970) .

25 Aleister Crowley The Confessions of Aleister Crowley (New York: Bantam Books, 1972) p. 7.

26 Martin Booth Introduction to Aleister Crowley Selected Poems (London: Crucible, 1986) p. 17.

27 For a full account of Neuberg's relationship with Crowley, see Jean Overton Fuller's The Magical Dilemma of Victor Neuberg.

28 Doubts about how Machen is pronounced once prompted Cyril Connolly to remark that, "If I had been Arthur Machen, I would have added "rhymes with Bracken" to my signature by deed-poll, for nothing harms an author's sales like an ambiguity in the pronunciation of his name."

29 Machen lost his job with the Evening News in 1921 when he wrote a premature obituary of Lord Alfred Douglas. Reported dead, Machen's obituary used the word "degenerate;" Bosie, however, was very much alive and sued. The Evening News had to pay £1,000 in damages and Machen was fired.

30 Machen, however, did not think much of Wilde, referring to him as "an obese French washerwoman."

31 Maupassant was also generous to less successful writers, and for a time supported Villiers de l'Isle-Adam.

32 Charcot was also apparently a great collector of what we might call demonic erotica, and spent his leisure time perusing the works of Felicien Rops and other less well known outre artists.

33 An English translation of "The Horla" appeared in a collection called Modern Ghosts in 1890, predating Wells' The Invisible Man by seven years. There had, of course, been fairy and folk tales involving invisibility for generations, but Maupassant's might be the first to offer a scientific account of the condition.

34 The name became so associated with Maupassant that he gave it to the balloon in which he travelled from Paris to Holland in July 1887, christening it `Le Horla'. An astute careerist, the stunt helped to publicize the collection of stories containing the tale.

35 Yet of the two Strindberg is clearly the more profound. For all his technical brilliance, Maupassant, like his contemporaries the Impressionists, lived on the surface, and his vision of life is shallow. Colin Wilson's remark that he is "the most brainless of all the great writers" is perhaps not an overstatement.

36 He was, of course, a considerable painter and water colourist.

37 It was around this time that Yeats met Strindberg and later remarked in his memoirs that when he met the playwright he was "searching for the Philosopher's Stone."

38 Characteristically, the story of how Meyrink pitched the novel to Kurt Wolff, its publisher, is, as we might expect, the stuff of legend. "I remember Meyrink's visit well," Wolff recalled, "a gentleman of aristocratic appearance and impeccable manners, with a slight limp. He had the honour, he said of proposing that the firm accept his first novel, although no typescript of it was available yet. He had recorded it on a dictating machine ... (but) he had brought along a handwritten copy of the first chapter. He wished to reach an agreement on the novel at once, before returning to Munich the following day. He would not demand the usual royalties, but instead desired immediate payment of ten thousand marks as a lump sum, in return for all rights and editions ... Would I be so kind, he asked, as to read the pages ... and to make a decision?

"Taken aback and embarrassed, I read the folio pages ... and was then expected ... to say yes or no I found the situation absurd, wanted to show I was equal to it - and said yes." (Kurt Wolff A Portrait in Essays and Letters ed. Michael Ermarth (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press)), pp. 12-13.

39 Meyrink was a friend of Friedrich Eckstein, the Viennese esotericist who, legend has it, first introduced Rudolf Steiner to the doctrines of theosophy, passing on to Steiner a copy of A. Sinnet's Esoteric Buddhism.

40 Anthroposophy means the "wisdom of man" as opposed to theosophy's "wisdom of the gods".

41 For an interesting perspective on Steiner's first marriage to the widow Anna Eunicke, see James Webb's The Occult Establishment (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1976), p. 64.

42 Nicolas Berdyaev Dream and Reality (London: Geoffrey Bles,1950) pp. 192-194. Berdyaev's autobiography is a key document on the Russian fin de siecle, and Steiner was not the only occultist or mystic to receive his animus. As an eccentric Marxist, Nietzschean, and Russian Orthodox existentialist, it isn't surprising he would find fault with much of what went on in the "highly charged and intense atmosphere of the early 20th century Russian cultural renascence." Berdyaev was highly critical, for example, of the sway Dirmtri Merzhkovsky and his wife, the poet Zinaida Hippius, had on the sensibility of the time. Merzhkovsky, who blended speculations on sex and a coming God-Man with Atlantis "lived in an atmosphere of unhealthy, self-assertive sectarian mysticism." His wife, with whom Berdyaev enjoyed a brief friendship, had "a profound understanding of others, blended with a capacity for inflicting pain on them. There was something snake-like about her. She was fragile, subtle, brilliant and entirely devoid of human warmth." Pp. 144-145.

43 Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900), the son of an eminent historian who was also a priest, abandoned his early materialist philosophy after he underwent the first in a series of mystical experiences involving a vision of the Divine Sophia. In 1872 in the second-class carriage of the Moscow-Kharkov train Soloviev saw the young girl who sat across from him become a living embodiment of the divine Woman. Prompted by this, Soloviev abandoned his scientific studies at Moscow University and enrolled at the Ecclesiastical Academy. In 1874 he published a book entitled The Crisis of Western Philosophy which argued that western philosophy arrived through rational knowledge at the same truths affirmed by spiritual contemplation. He then embarked on a study of Swedenborg. In 1874, during a sabbatical year, he studied Hindu, Gnostic and medieval texts at the British Museum, where he had the second vision of Sophia. Inspired by his experience, Soloviev promptly set off on a journey to Egypt, where he attracted some attention by wearing his long black overcoat and top hat in the summer heat. During a visit to Bedouins in the Suez desert - he believed they possessed certain secret kabbalistic teachings - he was abandoned and spent the night alone. The smell of roses awoke him in the morning, and he had the third visitation of Sophia. Returning to Russia he preached a doctrine of `integral life' and received some support from Dostoyevsky. In the last years of his life he was obsessed with apocalyptic visions and wrote a book War, Progress and the End of History and a short story "The Antichrist."

44 "... he had had occasion to develop a paradoxical theory about the necessity of destroying culture, because the period of obsolete humanism was over and cultural history now stood before us like weathered marl; a period of healthy brutishness was beginning, pushing forth out of the depths of the people (the hooliganism, the violence of the Apaches ...) All the phenomena of contemporary reality were divided by him into two categories; the symptoms of an already obsolete culture and the signs of a healthy barbarism ... Christianity is obsolete: in Satanism there is a crude fetish worship, that is, a healthy barbarism ..." Andrei Bely Petersburg (London: Penguin Books, 1995) translated by David McDuff, p. 399.

45 Work began on the Goetheanum in 1913 and was completed in 1920. On New Year's Eve 1922 the building, made entirely of wood and featuring immense twin cupolas, burnt to the ground; the cause of the blaze is still unknown, but there have been persistent rumors that it was begun by proto-Nazi groups in an act of occult warfare. In 1928, three years after Steiner's death, the second Goetheanum, made of reinforced concrete, was opened. Also designed by Steiner, it still stands today and remains the centre of the anthroposophical movement.

46 Quoted in David McDuff's introduction to his translation of Petersburg p. xix.

47 Petersburg p. xix.

48 Ibid. p.179.

49 Berdyaev pp. 195-196.

50 Asya Turgenev, a talented artist, remained devoted to Steiner, and her work on the glass engravings for the windows of the second Goetheanum can be seen in Dornach today.

The Modernist Occultist

"In all the poets of the modern tradition, poetry is a system of symbols and analogies parallel to that of the hermetic sciences."' Without doubt true of poetry, this remark by Octavio Paz could easily be said of many other art forms in the modern tradition as well. Among novelists, painters and musicians, in a variety of ways, art in the modern period took on an arcane and esoteric character leading to a profound chasm between an increasingly difficult avant garde and an increasingly baffled general public.' The reasons for this are diverse. For literature, the growth in literacy and the audience for popular entertainment it created certainly played a part. With fiction and other literary forms falling prey to commercial interests and the need to appeal to the lowest common denominator, serious writers sought out new and unavoidably difficult means of communicating their insights. With the inflation of their currency - language - this led to a search for a means of expression not yet appropriated by the burgeoning print medium. Newspapers, popular fiction and magazines churned out words by the million, and the worn coins of everyday speech were less and less able to communicate anything more than the most commonplace meanings. The reaction to this among writers and poets ranged from the protracted syntax of Proust or Hermann Broch, to the brusque onomatopoeia of Marinetti or Hugo Ball, to zaum, the meaningless "language of the future" spoken by Velimir Khlebnikov and other members of the Russian avant garde. The parallels in painting and music are likewise clear. To give two examples, Wassily Kandinsky's abstract canvases moved away from an art that represented an external world no longer able to reflect a spiritual reality, and toward the immediate communication of an inner one; while at the same time his friend Arnold Schoenberg's atonal music dismantled the structure of a played out western harmony and, like Kandinsky's paintings, presented a new and startling avenue to the artist's own troubled psyche.

This dichotomy between an increasingly difficult art and a growing middle-brow demand for product is an outcome of the cul-de-sac reached via the route of Symbolism. As the external world became little more than a symbol of a higher, spiritual plane, and the artist the interpreter and high priest of this hidden reality, the means of communication required a greater and greater purity, a medium uncluttered with the gross manifestations of the physical world. This eventually led, as mentioned earlier, to Mallarme's blank page and Malevich's white canvases. It also led to artists seeking out new mythologies to house the meaning and significance no longer contained by the overused emblems of the past. In his Lectures on Aesthetics the philosopher Hegel argued that art would eventually dwindle to something like decoration and entertainment. Hegel argued that as Geist, the world-spirit, continued to evolve, the brief but glorious marriage between the inner and outer worlds exemplified by the art works of classical Greece would necessarily split asunder. Gothic art, with the soaring cathedral spire as its most paradigmatic symbol, led in Hegel's own time to Romanticism and the aesthetics of the strange and bizarre. By the 20th century, Romanticism had been played out and when artists did not retreat into silence, they adopted other methods of holding together the chaos of the modern era.'

Novelists like James Joyce took the framework of classical mythology and superimposed it on the banal experiences of a modern day everyman. The ironic double-exposure of Ulysses, however, proved a dead end and in Finnegan's Wake Joyce produced an extended full-stop to the experimental novel. Starting with an attempt to perceive four-dimensionally, cubism later turned, in the work of Kurt Schwitters, to no longer painting cigarette packs, but fixing them directly to the canvas. This eventually led to Andy Warhol and the notorious Brillo box by way of Duchamp's urinal. Yet other mythologies were also available, and one in particular found many adherents: the occult. As a case in point, two of the artists mentioned above, Kandinsky and Schoenberg, were both deep readers in different schools of occultism. Kandinsky's theories on colour and form presented in his essay On the Spiritual in Art were profoundly influenced by the ideas of theosophy and Rudolf Steiner. And in his unfinished oratorio Jacob's Ladder, Schoenberg, a reader of Swedenborg by way of Balzac's Seraphita, depicts Heaven as seen by Swedenborgian angels who, no matter which way they turn, always face God.' "Whether right, left, forward or backward, up or down - one has to go on without asking what lies before or behind us," Schoenberg's angel Gabriel remarks.

To do justice to all the artists and writers in the 20th century who adopted various forms of occultism as either a framework for their creativity or, in many cases, an actual world-view, would require a separate

book. In painting a very brief run through would give us, along with Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian,Joseph Beuys, and Nicholas Roerich; and in music, along with Schoenberg, Alexandre Scriabin, Gustav Holst, Olivier Messiaen, John Cage 5 and Karlheinz Stockhausen. In literature, with which we are principally concerned, the list would include Yeats, Thomas Mann, Henry Miller, T.S. Eliot, Hermann Hesse, Ezra Pound, John Cowper Powys, William Burroughs, Aldous Huxley, Hart Crane, Lawrence Durrell, Jorge Louis Borges, David Lindsay ", Stefan George, Georges Bataille, Ernst Jiinger, Andre Breton, J.B. Priestley, Walter Benjamin, Christian Morgenstern, John Fowles, Saul Bellow, Iain Sinclair, Robert Irwin, Colin Wilson and several others!

What I propose to do in the remaining section is present a selection of modern authors who either practised a form of occult or esoteric discipline, possessed to some degree what we would call occult powers, or developed an occult or mystical philosophy or world-view to offset the increasingly reductive scientific orthodoxy of the modern era. Personal preference and space has, of course, had a hand in my selection, but I've also tried to choose writers who are not as well known as some others associated with the occult: Yeats, for example, or, in more recent times, Eliot and Pound.' That The Waste Land includes references to Madame Blavatsky ("Madame Sosostris"), the Tarot, the Grail legend, Hesse's essay on "Russian Man" and elements of Hinduism is well known. What is not as well known is that Eliot attended P.D. Ouspensky's early London talks and that later poems, like the Four Quartets, contain references to time that could well have served as basic themes in Ouspensky's lectures. "In my end is my beginning," captures Ouspensky's ideas on eternal recurrence in a single sentence. Although Eliot later spurned his early fascination with the occult, finding a haven in tradition and the Church of England, his example shows that, far from an outmoded form of superstition, the occult was very modern indeed.

All of the writers I've chosen wrote poetry as well as fiction, though some were better known for one form rather than another.

Fernando Pessoa

Until relatively recently, the work of the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa was little known, but in the last few years he's been rediscovered by several critics, mostly on the strength of various translations of his Livro do Desassossego or Book of Disquiet, a collection of unfinished angst-ridden texts found in a trunk after Pessoa's death. The fragmentary nature of these writings - jotted on scraps of paper, the backs of envelopes, the reverse side of other manuscripts and other odd places - makes Pessoa a prime postmodern figure, and the trunk, whose contents are still being catalogued (it contained some 25,000 items) has taken on the same mythical character as the valise Walter Benjamin carried on his fateful escape from Vichy France.`' Like Benjamin, in many ways Pessoa's posthumous celebrity is founded as much upon his life as upon his work. In Benjamin's case, his life embodies the myth of the Jewish intellectual on the run from the Nazis. In Pessoa's the story is less political; not only does he embody the disjointed, fractured postmodern ethos in his work, but in his very psyche.

Fernando Pessoa was born in Lisbon in 1888 and aside from his childhood and adolescence spent in Durban, South Africa, upon his return to Lisbon in 1905, he never left the city again. After his father died from tuberculosis when Fernando was five his mother soon remarried, and her husband received a post at Durban as the Portuguese consul. Educated at an English high school, Pessoa proved a precocious child and brilliant student, and his early schooling instilled a lifelong love for England and English literature. In later years he took to behaving and dressing with "British restraint", and The Pickwick Papers was, he said, his constant companion. His command of English (also French) was impeccable, if eccentric, and his first published book was a collection of his English poems. As his translator John Griffin remarks, these are of little interest poetically and they received courteous but unenthusiastic reviews from The Times and Glasgow Herald. Although he published articles and poems in several literary magazines, aside from his English efforts, the only other book of Pessoa's to be published in his lifetime would appear in 1934, the year before he died. Mensagem (Message) is an extended esoteric poem arguing for the return of Dom Sebastiao, Portugal's King Arthur, and for Portugal's pre-eminence in a coming Fifth Empire of the spirit.

Espousing Pessoa's peculiarly mystical patriotism, the book received a consolation prize in a national competition. This was a late and slightly backhanded recognition of Pessoa's genius, something that, as often happens, would only become common knowledge after the poet's death. Supporting himself as a freelance translator of English and French correspondence for several commercial firms, after a lonely, solitary life, spent in relatives' houses or in rented rooms, Pessoa, who more than likely remained a virgin, died in 1935 from acute hepatitis brought on by heavy drinking.

Pessoa's poetry is aptly described as the central work of Portuguese modernism, and for this alone he deserves his belated recognition. But Pessoa wrote more than poems. His legendary trunk contained a wealth of miscellaneous writings on philosophy, sociology, history, literary criticism, as well as short stories, plays, treatises on astrology and a variety of auto biographical reflections. But in addition to the usual material produced by a writer, Pessoa is unique in that he also wrote as other writers and poets. These he called heteronyms, coining the term to distinguish it from the common pseudonym. Pessoa was not simply writing poems and prose under a different name: the various heteronyms he created were individuals with their own history, biography, personal characteristics and unmistakable literary style.

For a solitary individual, living alone in small rooms, to occasionally talk to himself seems not unusual. In Pessoa's case, what began as a childhood game of having conversations with imaginary characters1' - "nonexistent acquaintances," he called them - became in later years an obsession with depersonalization and the fracturing of the self. Indeed, Pessoa's grip on his own self was so tenuous that at one point he took to writing his old teachers and schoolmates in Durban, posing as the psychiatrist Faustino Antunes, asking for their opinion on the mental state of his patient, Fernando Pessoa who, depending on the letter, had either committed suicide or was under restraint at an asylum. Having no idea who he was, Pessoa hoped to gain some insight from those who knew him.

Pessoa lived with a constant fear of madness. At the age of twenty he wrote that, "One of my mental complications - horrible beyond words - is a fear of insanity, which itself is insanity."' This fear was complicated by an equally distressing inability to act. "I suffer - on the very limit of madness, I swear it - as if I could do all and was unable to do it, by deficiency of Will.,, 12 Pessoa was one of the most costive of writers: his inexhaustible trunk, filled with the plans of hundreds of uncompleted projects, is testament to this. This "purely negative" characteristic, as he called it, was complemented by an interior world seemingly without ballast. In a "Personal Note" for 1910, Pessoa announced that, "I am now in possession of the fundamental laws of literary art." Neither Shakespeare nor Milton had anything left to teach him. In consequence of this, "My intellect has attained a pliancy and a reach that enable me to assume any emotion I desire and enter at will into any state of mind." Yet this easy command of interior states came at a price. "For that which it is ever an anguish and an effort to strive for, completeness, no book at all can be an aid.""

Given this imbalance between an inability to do and a fluctuating sense of self, it's small wonder that Pessoa would compensate for this by inventing - if that's the correct word - an altogether straightforward, absolutely uncomplicated and unselfconscious alter ego. In a letter to the editor A. Casais Monteiro, Pessoa explained how his heteronyms came about. In 1912, after an unsuccessful attempt at writing "pagan poems" Pessoa was nevertheless left with a vague idea of their author. This was not himself, but Ricardo Reis, an Epicurean classicist who was the urbane, sophisticated disciple of yet another invented poet, Alberto Caeiro.14 Caeiro arrived after Pessoa tried, again unsuccessfully, to invent a kind of nature poet. As Pessoa writes:

On the day when I finally desisted - it was the 8th of March, 1914 - I went over to a high desk and, taking a sheet of paper, began to write, standing, as I always write when I can. And I wrote thirty-odd poems straight off, in a kind of ecstasy whose nature I cannot define. It was the triumphal day of my life, and I shall never have another like it. I started with a title - `The Keeper of Sheep'. And what followed was the apparition of somebody in me, to whom I at once gave the name Alberto Caeiro. Forgive me the absurdity of the phrase: my master had appeared in me. This was the immediate sensation I had.15

Other heteronyms and poems followed soon after: the aforementioned Ricardo Reis; the futurist Alvaro de Campos (both, like Pessoa himself, disciples of Caeiro); Alexander Search, Thomas Crosse and Charles

Robert Anon, all Englishmen; Jean Seul, a Frenchman; the astrologer Raphael Baldaya; the Baron of Teive (like Pessoa, unable to finish anything, except his own life when he committed suicide); the pagan Antonio Mora; Bernardo Soares, ostensible author of the interminable Book of Disquiet, and many more. Although new heteronyms continue to emerge, the central cast is made up of Caeiro, Reis, de Campos and Soares, with occasional appearances by Pessoa himself. Caeiro, who as a bucolic poet of sheer immediacy was the polar opposite of Pessoa, espoused a philosophy of complete unreflectiveness, a Portuguese variant of Zen satori.'6 "My mysticism is not to try to know/It is to live and not think about it," Pessoa's master wrote, something Pessoa himself found impossible to do. This Zen quality led the Catholic monk Thomas Merton to translate some of Caeiro/Pessoa's verse and show them to the Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki.

Even without Pessoa's occult interests, which we will examine shortly, his account of the appearance of Alberto Caeiro is enough to suggest something paranormal. `Ecstasy', `apparition', `master': all three suggest something along the lines of possession, mediumship and Madame Blavatsky's spiritual guides, although Pessoa himself was critical of theosophy and was even advised during a session of automatic writing to, "Read no more theosophical books." (His heteronym Raphael Baldaya attacked Blavatsky savagely in a predictably unfinished essay.) Although in the next decade surrealists like Andre Breton, Philippe Soupault, and Robert Desnos all practised automatic writing and Breton himself was a reader of Eliphas Levi and other occult writers - their interest in it was in a sense more political than occult, or even poetic, seeking, as it were, an open avenue to the `repressed' unconscious. Pessoa, however, for a time at least took the practice seriously, influenced in this by his Aunt Anica, a devoted student of the occult, with whom he lived between 1912 and 1914. Between 1916 and 1917, Pessoa engaged in a series of automatic writing sessions, making contact with several intelligences: Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist, a character named Wardour and a dark figure called the Voodooist. While interesting biographically, Pessoa's automatic writings - accomplished sometimes with a planchette - lack the inspiration of his heteronymic efforts; most of them are encouragements to lose his virginity (sadly ineffective) and admonitions about his habit of masturbation. "Very soon you will know what you have courage for - namely, for mating with a girl," Henry More informed him. "You masturbator! You masochist! You man without manhood! ... You man without a man's prick!" another astral interlocutor opined." On other occasions these sessions produced a variety of occult signs and symbols, Masonic and kabbalistic insignia whose meaning troubled Pessoa.

Along with automatic writing, Pessoa developed other occult skills. Writing to his Aunt Anica in June 1916, Pessoa informed her that, along with becoming a medium, he had developed other paranormal powers. One of these was a kind of telepathy. When his great friend Mario De Si-Carneiro was in Paris, going through the emotional crisis that led to his suicide at 26 - downing several vials of strychnine - Pessoa, he told his aunt, felt Si-Carneiro's anguish there, in Lisbon, being overwhelmed by a sudden depression. But his great achievement was the development of `etheric vision.' "There are moments," ... he told his aunt:

when I have sudden flashes of `etheric vision' and can see certain people's `magnetic auras' and especially my own, reflected in the mirror, and radiating from my hands in the dark. In one of my best moments of etheric vision ... I saw someone's ribs through his coat and skin ... My `astral vision' is still very basic, but sometimes, at night, I close my eyes and see a swift succession of small and sharply defined pictures ... I see strange shapes, designs, symbolic signs, numbers ..."

Like Gerard de Nerval, Pessoa had an interest in occult history and was fascinated by secret societies and organizations. One form this took was an attack on the Salazar government's proposed ban on freemasonry; in the Didrio de Lisboa for 4 February 1935, Pessoa published an article on "Secret Associations," defending freemasonry and, by association, other occult societies. In Pessoa's occult history of the world, freemasonry was the contemporary embodiment of a mystical dissension that began in ancient times with the Gnostics. A lifelong opponent of Christianity, Pessoa saw the "Gnostic heresy" surface at different periods in history, appearing as the kabbalists of 12th century Spain, the Knights of Malta, the Knights Templar, the Rosicrucians, the alchemists, and, in most recent times, freemasonry. Rosicrucianism, however, was perhaps his favourite branch of this esoteric tree. In "At the Tomb of Christian Rosenkreuz" Pessoa wrote that:

God is the Man of another God, greater:
Supreme Adam, He also had His Fall;
He also, just as He was our Creator,
Was created, and to Him the Truth died . . .
The Abyss, His Spirit, bans it Him from the far side;
Here, in the World His Body, there's none at all.[19]

Although there is no traceable connection between the Gnostics and the Rosicrucians - several centuries separate them in time - Pessoa associated the Gnostic idea of the fallen world and the den-ii-urge responsible for it, with the 17th century followers of Christian Rosenkreuz.

Although Pessoa did know a few people who shared his occult interests, most of his contact with other occultists was via correspondence. Of these, the most celebrated was Aleister Crowley. In recent times, the extent to which Pessoa read Crowley and actually modelled his own ideas about secret societies on accounts of Crowley's own groups, has become the subject of historical research.20 Pessoa first made contact with Crowley when he wrote to the Great Beast, pointing out an error in the natal horoscope published in Crowley's notorious Confessions (Pessoa was a keen astrologer and at one point considered pursuing the craft professionally). Crowley replied and the two poets exchanged letters and writings; Pessoa even translated Crowley's "Hymn to Pan" into Portuguese. In September 1930, Crowley arrived in Lisbon, with his current Scarlet Woman. The couple quarrelled and Crowley's girlfriend left the country, leaving a deflated Great Beast behind. Crowley then enlisted Pessoa's aid in faking a suicide. Leaving a forlorn lover's note at the Boca do Inferno (Mouth of Hell) - a treacherous rock formation on the coast west of Lisbon - Crowley implied that he had taken his own life by leaping into the sea. Pessoa explained to the Lisbon papers the meaning of the various magical signs and symbols that adorned Crowley's suicide note, and added the fact that he had actually seen Crowley's ghost the following day. Crowley had in fact left Portugal via Spain, and enjoyed the reports of his death in the newspapers; he finally appeared weeks later at an exhibition of his paintings in Berlin. Given Pessoa's frail ego, it was more than likely a blessing that his association with the Great Beast was brief.

What Pessoa actually believed is a difficult question. In the letter describing the birth of his heteronyms, he also enlarged on his occult ideas. "I believe in the existence of worlds higher than our own and in the existence of beings that inhabit these worlds," he wrote, and went on to say that he believed that, "we can, according to the degree of our spiritual attunement, communicate with ever high beings. i21 But for Bernardo Soares, things are not so clear. "I spent frightful nights hunched over tomes by mystics and kabbalists which I never had the patience to read except intermittently ... The rites and mysteries of the Rosicrucians, the symbolism of the Kabbalah and the Templars ... all of this oppressed me for a long time." This led to an "almost physical loathing for secret things ... secret societies, occult sciences ... the pretension certain men have that, through their understandings with Gods or Masters or Demiurges, they and they alone know the great secrets on which the world is founded." But what really troubled the author of The Book of Disquiet is that all these mystic masters were such atrocious stylists. "When they write to communicate ... their mysteries," he said, "[they] all write abominably. It offends my intelligence that a man can master the Devil without being able to master the Portuguese language." Yet Satanists alone are not at fault. "To have touched the feet of Christ," Soares tells us, "is no excuse for mistakes in punctuation. ,12

Rene Daumal

Sometime in the year 1924 the precocious French poet Rene Daumal soaked a handkerchief in carbon tetrachloride - a powerful anaesthetic he used for his beetle collection - and held it to his nostrils. Instantly the sixteen-year-old felt himself "thrown brutally into another world," a strange dimension of geometric forms and incomprehensible sounds, in which his mind "travelled too fast to drag words along with it."zs

It was his first encounter with what he would later call "absurd evidence": proof that another existence lies beyond the conscious mind. Obsessed with the mystery of death, Rene was determined to peek at "the great beyond." When the anaesthetizing effects of the fumes proved too great, Rene's hand would drop from his face and he would regain consciousness, his mind reeling - and his head aching - from his recent plunge into somewhere else.

Daumal took these trips hundreds of times, sometimes alone, sometimes with friends, always with the same result: the conviction that he had briefly entered "another world." It is almost certain that the repeated use of carbon tetrachloride started the weakening of his lungs with led to his death from tuberculosis in 1944 at the age of 36.

Born in 1908 in the forests of the Ardennes, not far from the Belgian border, like his hero, the equally precocious Arthur Rimbaud (with whom he shared an early death, a fascination with drugs, and an interest in the occult), Daumal was educated at Charleville. Early on he displayed two lifelong characteristics: a brilliant intellect and an obsession with the "beyond'. This last manifested itself at a young age in a fascination with death. At the age of 6, Rene kept himself awake, caught in the stranglehold of `nothingness'. This early confrontation with the void led to exhausting experiments with entering dreams while still awake and strenuous attempts at `lucid dreaming'.24 They also led to his teenage attempts at suicide as well as the basic themes of his first collection of poetry, Counter Heaven, for which he won a literary prize in 1935.

In his early years, Rene found scant opportunity to discuss these matters. Although his paternal grandfather was a Mason who started his own esoteric lodge, most adults gave Rene's existential concerns little thought. But during his teens, Rene was not alone. When his family moved to Reims and entered the boy in the lycee, Rene met three other young mental voyagers who shared his taste for metaphysical speculation. In 1922, with Roger Vailland, Robert Meyrat, and Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, Rene started a kind of secret society.

The Simplists, as they called themselves, became inseparable, and along with reading decadent poets like Baudelaire and Rimbaud, they also studied works on occultism and theosophy and carried out experiments in parapsychology and magic, some of which included the use of hashish and opium. In one experiment, Daumal walked alone for hours with his eyes closed, strangely avoiding obstacles in his path. Other experiments included astral travelling, shared dreams, precognition, attempts to open the third eye, and a form of second sight called "paroptic vision."

In these experiments, Daumal revealed an uncanny ability to determine the identity of objects with his eyes closed in a darkened room while wearing tight-fitting, blackened goggles. During these sessions Daumal would be hypnotized; he would then hold his hands near the objects, or place them on a specially covered box containing some item. Daumal could see the images on book covers and even sense colours by the temperature they gave off.

In 1925 Daumal entered the prestigious Lycee Henri IV in Paris, to prepare for examinations to enter the Ecole Normale Superieure. One of his professors was the philosopher Emile Chartier, better known under his pen-name Alain. Along with his work in mathematics, philosophy, science and medicine, Daumal studied Sanskrit, mastering the language in three years, composing a grammar and beginning several translations. He also read the works of the traditionalist Rene Guenon and wrote a series of essays on Indian aesthetics, posthumously published as Rasa (1982).

At the time of Daumal's studies in ancient traditions, however, Paris was a hotbed of modernism, and ho group was more vociferous than the surrealists, who shared with him a fascination with the occult and paranormal. In 1927, Daumal suffered a fall which led to a period of amnesia; this prevented him from taking his entrance examinations, so he began a course of free studies in philosophy at the Sorbonne. There he met the Czech painter Joseph Sima and the Siberian-born, naturalized American Vera Milanova, who later became his wife. With the poet Andre Rolland de Reneville and the other Simplists, the nineteen-year-old Daumal embarked on the short-lived literary review for which he is most remembered in France

today, Le Grand Jeu (The Big Game).

The wild blend of Guenon, Alfred Jarry's Pataphysics, occultism and arcane scholarship in Le Grand Jeu posed a threat to surrealism. When the first issue appeared in 1928, surrealism had been around for a decade, but had lost momentum in endless squabbles over politics and egos. The Simplists, scarcely out of their teens, calling for a "Revolution of Reality returning to its source" and claiming to speak the same word as "uttered by the Vedic Rishis, the kabbalist Rabbis, the prophets, the mystics and the great heretics of all time and the true Poets," were bound to attract the older group's attention.25 Overtures were made to bring them into the fold, but Daumal firmly declined. Andre Breton, deep into Marxism, retaliated by openly criticizing Le Grand Jeu for its ideological failings. Daumal, unfazed, answered that Breton should beware of "eventually figuring in the study guides to literary history."

Daumal emerged from the skirmish intact, but both he and Le Grand Jeu were not in good shape. By 1929, his childhood friend Roger Gilbert-Lecomte had succumbed to the drug addiction that would eventually kill him. Daumal himself was barely scratching out an existence, living in poverty, losing his teeth, and feeling the ravages of his various experiments. If Daumal rejected Breton's solicitations, it was not from lack of need for a father figure. He was merely waiting to meet a more remarkable man.

On 30 November at the Cafe Figon on the Boulevard St. Germain- a man whom Joseph Sima recognized from a previous collaboration sat at a table drinking calvados and beer, and drawing odd Arabic and Oriental designs. Sima approached his acquaintance and introduced the famous artist Alexandre de Salzmann to his young friend Rene. De Salzmann, a world-renowned authority of theatre lighting and set design, engaged Daumal and the others in conversation. Then, after a few minutes, he proposed a test: he asked the group to hold their arms straight out at the side for as long as they could. Several minutes later only Daumal's remained in the air. De Salzmann smiled and said, "You interest me." Daumal had met his remarkable man.

Since 1918, Alexandre de Salzmann and his wife Jeanne had been students of the enigmatic Russian guru Gurdjieff. Born into an aristocratic family in Tiflis, Georgia, like Gurdjieff, de Salzmann had a colourful past, part of which included being kidnapped by brigands as a teenager. He claimed to have lost his teeth when falling from a mountain while in the service of a Russian Grand Duke. However, like Gurdjieff, de Salzmann enjoyed frequent leg-pulling and his many claims should be taken with a grain of salt. Yet he certainly shared one character trait with his master. de Salzmann was a remarkably versatile man, enthusiastic about everything. When Daumal first encountered him, he described de Salzmann as a "former dervish, former Benedictine, former professor of jiujitsu, healer and stage designer. ,2

After studies in Moscow, de Salzmann headed for Munich, where he became involved in the Art Nouveau movement, becoming friends with Rilke and Kandinsky and contribut= ing illustrations to important journals like Jugend and Sim- plicissimus. It was here that he met the composer Thomas de Hartmann, who would later introduce him to Gurdjieff. In 1911 he went to Hellerau, where he developed a new system of stage lighting; among others, the poet Paul Claudel was captivated by his work. It was also there that he met his wife Jeanne, a teacher of eurhythmics; after Gurdjieff s death in 1949, she became the central living exponent of "the work."

de Salzmann's relationship with Gurdjieff was ambiguous. At the time of de Salzmann's death from tuberculosis in 1933, Gurdjieff had apparently cut off his student of fifteen years, refusing to visit him as he lay dying in a hotel room. When the weak sickly man finally summoned the strength to confront Gurdjieff, his master all but ignored him. Whatever the esoteric meaning behind Gurdjiefl's behaviour, this incident must remain one of the darkest in the history of "the work."

When the twenty-one-year-old Daumal met de Salzmann, he had no doubt his moment of destiny had arrived. Gurdjieff had been in France since 1922, directing the activities at his famous prieure in Fontainebleau, where, ironically, another young writer, Katharine Mansfield, also died of tuberculosis. But by 1924, Gurdjieff had suffered a mysterious car accident and had lost interest in his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man. Instead he laboured at the monumental Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson, gaining inspiration from copious amounts of black coffee and armagnac.

When Daumal met de Salzmann, the artist was making a living as an interior decorator and antique dealer. Still thirsting for the absolute, Daumal now drank greedily from one of its living wells. Rene and Vera spent endless nights talking with de Salzmann about Gurdjieff, and eventually de Salzmann appeared in fictional form in Daumal's two allegorical novels. La Grande Beuverie (1938), translated as A Night of Serious Drinking, was started during Daumal's brief stay in New York while working as a press agent for the Indian dan= cer Uday Shankar, and was a send up of the various artistic movements at large in Paris in the years between the wars. Although the novel, like Daumal's early experiments with carbon tetrachloride, is concerned with intoxicated states, Daumal's preface states his aesthetic and philosophical credo with admirable concision: "I refuse to accept," he writes, "that a clear thought can ever be inexpressible." Unlike most of the surrealist texts, Daumal's work is characterized by clarity and directness. While much of the automatic writing produced by Breton, Desnos and others is almost unreadable, Daumal's deceptively simple prose remains immediately accessible. This is especially true of his later, unfinished novel Mount Analogue (1952), in which de Salzmann appears as Professor Pierre Sogol.

After de Salzmann's death, Rene and Vera threw themselves into "the work" with a dedication that troubled their friends. In a house in Seves, a suburb of Paris, Jeanne de Salzmann set up a kind of mini-prieure, a communal home dedicated to Gurdjiefl's teachings. There, with the orientalist Philippe Lavastine and a few others, Rene and Vera pursued the difficult task of `waking up'. They struggled through Gurdjiefl's "movements," incredibly difficult physical exercises designed to tap unused energies and overcome "sleep," and investigated the effect of music on the human organism. Yet during this time Daumal's health deteriorated; his rotting teeth were pulled and he became deaf in his left ear. He kept his failing body and growing soul together by contributing to L'Encyclopedie Franfaise and through translations of Hemingway and D.T. Suzuki's Essays on Zen Buddhism.

In 1938 Daumal began to work with Gurdjieff directly, attending the famous dinners in Gurdjieffs tiny flat on the rue de Colonel Renards. This was a turning point in his life sadly parallelled by another: in the same year he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Daumal rejected treatment and refused to enter a sanatorium.27

In 1940 Germany invaded France. Vera was Jewish, and for his remaining years, Daumal eked out an increasingly precarious existence, constantly on the run from the Gestapo and the Vichy government. In 1941 tubercular arthritis developed in his left foot; two years later a synovial tumour erupted and the resulting infection caused him excruciating pain. Like his hero Rimbaud, for the last six months of his life Daumal was unable to walk. In the end malnourishment and a punishing habit of chain-smoking Gauloises killed him. In April 1944 Daumal died. An uncompleted sentence in the manuscript of Mount Analogue marks the point at which his quest for the absolute ended.

Subtitled A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing, Mount Analogue resists final interpretation. A riveting marvel tale, it is also a modern day Pilgrim's Progress. Led by Professor Sogol, eight adventurers board the yacht Impossible to discover the invisible but "absolutely real" Mount Analogue, a symbol of spiritual pursuit. Though it is hidden from ordinary eyes, Sogol pinpoints its location through a series of supra-logical deductions involving the curvature of space.

Convinced of the necessity of Mount Analogue's existence, the crew eventually arrive. And although "long expectation of the unknown lessens the final effect of surprise," the group's first encounter with their destination was nevertheless extraordinary:

... while we waited tense in the bows with the sun behind us, a wind rose without any warning, or rather a powerful suction suddenly pulled us forward, space opened ahead of us, a bottomless emptiness, a horizontal abyss of air and water impossibly entwined. The boat creaked in all its timbers and was hurled forward unerringly along a rising slope as far as the centre of the abyss and was suddenly set adrift in a wide calm bay, in sight of land.""

A flotilla of boats manned by Europeans came out to meet them, and the leader led them to a white house where, in a bare room with a red tile floor, a man in mountain dress received them. He asked them some obvious questions which, unexpectedly, the group found very difficult to answer:

Each one of his questions - all of them very simple: Who were we? Why had we come? - caught us completely off our guard and seemed to probe our very insides. Who are you? Who am I? We could not answer him as we would a police official or a customs inspector. Give one's name and profession? What does that mean? But who are you? And what are you? The words we uttered - we had none better - were worthless, repugnant and grotesque as dead things.Z"

They soon discovered that all authority on Mount Analogue is in the hand of the mountain guides, and, by what seemed a miracle of coincidence, that they had landed on a spot, Port o' Monkeys, peopled by Frenchmen, like themselves. There were no natives on Mount Analogue; everyone there came from somewhere else. And although there wasn't "a single quadrumanous species in the region," their harbour nevertheless had its odd name. "I find it hard to describe my reaction," the narrator remarks, "but that name summoned up in my mind, rather disagreeably, all my heritage as a twentieth-century Occidental - something curious, imitative, shameless, agitated. Our port of arrival could not have been any other than Port o' Monkeys."s0

But perhaps the strangest discovery was the material the inhabitants used for money. Before arriving, the crew had been troubled about what they might use to barter with the natives. They knew that for bartering with "primitive" people, travellers bring along a supply of trinkets: penknives, mirrors, combs, pipes, souvenirs, and other assorted junk. But in trying to trade with "the superior beings of Mount Analogue" such items would be useless. What did they possess of real value? With what could they pay for the new knowledge they would receive? For some time before arriving, each member of the crew made a "personal inventory" and as the days passed, each felt himself poorer, for "no one saw anything around him or in him which really belonged to him.""

This problem was solved when the group was told of the peradam, strange, nearly invisible crystals that symbolize the rare and difficult truths found on the spiritual path, and which can also serve as an emblem of Daumal's equally lucid prose:

There is found here, rarely on the lower slopes and more frequently as one ascends, a clear and extremely hard stone, spherical and of variable size. It is a true crystal and - an extraordinary instance entirely unknown elsewhere on the planet - a curved crystal ... this stone is called peradam. It may mean . . . `harder than diamond', as is very much the case or else `father of diamond'. And some say that diamond is in reality the product of the disintegration of peradam by a sort of squaring of the circle or ... cubing of the sphere. Or else the word may mean `Adam's stone' and have had some secret and profound complicity with the original nature of man.32

One of the peradam's most remarkable characteristics is that its "index of refraction" is "so close to that of air." Only the trained eye can discover them, but "to any person who seeks it with sincerity and out of true need it reveals itself by a brilliant sparkle like that of a dewdrop."33 These nearly invisible stones - reminiscent of the lapis sought by the alchemists - are the only material things of any value on Mount Analogue.

Although the novel's fragmentary character is in keeping with Gurdjieff's "work" - Ouspensky's own masterpiece In Search of the Miraculous was originally titled Fragments of an Unknown Teaching - the fact that Daumal didn't live to finish it is a tragedy. But before his death he left an outline of the remaining chapters. "At the end," he said, "I want to speak of one of the basic laws of Mount Analogue. To reach the summit, one must proceed from encampment to encampment. But before setting out for the next refuge, one must prepare those coming after to occupy the place one is leaving. Only after having prepared them, can one go on up."34 The title of the last chapter was to be "And You, What Do You Seek?" Like Daumal's narrator faced with the questions of the mountain guide, his readers may have found this simple request difficult to fulfil.

O. V. de L. Milosz

The name Oscar Vladislas de Lubicz Milosz, like that of Villiers d'Isle-Adam, is not one frequently heard these days, although the efforts of his nephew, the Nobel Prize winning Czeslaw Milosz, to remedy this fact have been considerable. Milosz, like Villiers, although Polish and Lithuanian by ancestry, wrote some of the most eloquent French prose, and he also shared with Villiers two other characteristics. His writing is suffused with an hermetic and mystical doctrine reaching back to previous ages; and his family line began with the Serbian aristocracy of medieval times. Milosz set much store by this noble ancestry, as his adoption of the heraldic title de Lubicz attests; yet, unlike Villiers, this aristocratic lineage did not prevent him from coming to grips with the world, as his long and honoured diplomatic service to the Lithuanian government makes clear.35 Yet, like Villiers, one could say of Milosz that he existed in the flesh only out of sheer politeness. "One," he wrote, "can get used to everything: the important thing is to live as little as possible in what is called the world of reality. ,36 Milosz took this suggestion to heart, and for much of his life he spent his time in the imaginative realms of Goethe, Plato, Swedenborg and Dante, his masters on the road to illumination. He learned his lessons well, and on a cold winter night on 14 December, 1914, Milosz had a mystical experience which transfigured himself and his work. His close friend, Carlos Larronde, the theatrical producer, recalled speaking to Milosz soon after his enlightenment. Emerging from a week's long seclusion, Milosz opened the door to his small apartment and, greeting Larronde in the hallway said, "I have seen the spiritual sun."37 For some, Milosz's mystical writings are simply obscure, but sympathetic readers of his arcane and difficult esoteric works are prone to agree with this brief account of his experience.

O.V. de L. Milosz was born on 28 May 1877 on the vast family estate of Czereia, Lithuania. His father was a PolishLithuanian nobleman, his mother was Jewish, and his paternal grandmother Italian: along with his noble blood, Milosz had from the start the mix of races and ancestry that would lead his translator and editor Christopher Bamford to speak of him as "that almost impossible creature ... a fully realized Occidental, a true son and heir of the West ...s3s This crossroads of nationalities would emerge later in Milosz's fluency in several languages; by the age of twelve he spoke Polish, German and French perfectly, and to these was soon added English. (In later years he learned Hebrew and a Bible in that language was for a long time his bedside reading.) Along with fitting him for his future diplomatic service, this polyglot background prepared Milosz for the many translations he would make throughout his career, rendering Goethe, Byron, Shelley, Schiller, Mickiewicz, Pushkin, Lermontov and others into his adopted tongue. It also foreshadowed Milosz's fate as a national and spiritual wanderer, a destiny that, as the critic George Steiner remarked, is the defining characteristic of modern poets. Although at home in several tongues, finding a dwelling in a geographic place always proved a challenge to Milosz. This is one reason why, in later years, he adopted the calling of the Noble Traveller, an honorific given to Cagliostro, St.Germain, and other spiritual wanderers of the occult enlightenment whose "itineraries, though apparently haphazard, rigorously coincided with the adept's most secret aspirations and gifts ... 39

Milosz's childhood was unhappy; his father, wilful, anarchistic and atheist, suffered from a serious nervous disorder, and his mother's "materialistic and uncomprehending solicitude" sent the boy wandering alone through the vast parks of the family estate. Milosz later remarked that the affection he would have naturally had for his parents was siphoned off to others around him. He was particularly fond of his paternal grandparents, as well as his nurse Marie and his tutor Stanislas Doboszynski, who introduced him to Polish literature.

At the age of twelve, Milosz accompanied his parents to Paris, where his father was treated by the famous Dr. Charcot. A few months later, his parents returned to Warsaw, leaving Milosz behind as a student at the Lycee Janson de Sailly. Under the direction of Edouard Petit Milosz proved a brilliant student, but his education as a poet came from other hands. At thirteen Milosz was immersed in Lamartine, Baudelaire, Poe, as well as Goethe, Novalis, Holderlin, Byron, Shelley, Mickie- wicz and Slowacki. At eighteen Milosz was a regular at the Kalissaya, the first American bar in Paris, where he often shared a table with Oscar Wilde. On one occasion, Wilde is reported to have introduced Milosz to an acquaintance. Sitting at a table with George Moore, Ernest Lajeunesse, and the poet Moreas, Wilde saw Milosz come in and, turning to his friend said, "This is Moreas, the poet. And that is Milosz - poetry- itself

Milosz joined in the discussions about "pure poetry" at the Kalissaya and another literary haunt, the

Napolitaine. But for all his neo-Romanticism, Milosz was dissatisfied with talk of art for art's sake. In a letter to his great friend Christian Gauss, Milosz spoke of being "horribly sad ... with a sadness that nothing can vanquish." "This life," he. wrote, "is horribly empty with its anxious loneliness surrounded by the idiots of the Napolitaine and the Kalissaya ..."41

A few months later, on 1 January 1901, Milosz made a suicide attempt. "On the first of January ... towards eleven o'clock in the evening - with perfect calm, a cigarette at my lips - the human soul is, after all, a strange thing - I shot myself in the region of the heart with a revolver," he later wrote Gauss.41 He bungled the job, but his doctors didn't believe he'd recover. Miraculously he did. The next year he was recalled to Lithuania, to take up his responsibilities upon his father's death. By this time he had written and published his first collection of poetry, The Poem of Decadences, a timely title that does little justice to the poems themselves. It was also by then that articles recognizing Milosz's genius began to appear.

Between 1904 and 1914 an independently wealthy Milosz wrote, published and travelled. In 1905, he witnessed the aborted Russian Revolution; that same year he sold off his family estate to a government company engaged in parcelling out land to the peasants. (He invested the profits in Tsarist bonds; although he would live on their interest for some years, with the Bolshevik revolution, the move would prove disastrous.) In 1906 The Seven Solitudes as well as the fantasy prose poem "The Very Simple Story of Mr. Trix-Trix, Clown," was published. Between that year and 1910, Milosz wandered through Germany, Russia, Poland, England (which, like Pessoa, he loved immensely), Italy, Spain and North Africa. Although this life of the Noble Traveller had its joys - spiritual as well as carnal - Milosz felt this time was sterile. A sense of this emerges in his erotic mystical novel Amorous Initiation, which depicts in lush, poetic prose the ascent of its narrator from a demeaning obsession with a Venetian cour-. tesan to the pure love of the absolute, a theme Milosz would return to over the years.42 Although Milosz is known to have had several affairs, some inspiration for the novel certainly came from the unrequited love he felt for Emmy Heine-Gelder, a distant relative of the poet Heinrich Heine. Thirteen years his junior, Emmy, "the only woman I loved," rejected Milosz and married instead a younger man. The experience affected Milosz profoundly, and for the rest of his life, the idea and nature of love, "the hard labour of the dream," would be his central poetic concern.

Another novel, The Zborowskis, was started in 1910, as well as the poems making up The Elements. In the next year Milosz wrote the first of his mystery plays, Miguel Manara, inspired by an article he read in Le Temps while sitting in the bar, Le Fouquet, in the Champs Elysees. After writing the first four acts, Milosz wrote to his friend, the sculptor Leon Vogt, that the work is of an "extraordinary beauty" and that now he could "die without regrets." More translations appeared, as well as another mystery play, Mephiboseth. 1913 saw a trip to Rome, as well as Milosz's introduction to the esoteric circle surrounding the journal L'Affranchi ("The Liberated"). Les Veilleurs ("The Watchers") included the alchemist and eccentric Egyptologist Rene Schwaller; a few years later, Milosz would bestow upon Schwaller his heraldic title of de Lubicz.43 It was also at this time that Milosz contracted xanthoma, a skin condition that made him speak of himself as "a leper."

1914 saw more translations and poems appear, but it was in December of that year that Milosz underwent the profound experience that would change both his life and his work. Exactly what took place on the night of 14 December 1914 is unclear. In writing of his relative's illumination, Czeslaw Milosz compares it to the more famous transfiguration of Blaise Pascal, who, "from half past ten in the evening until about half past twelve" on 23 November 1654, experienced "FIRE/God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God ofJacob" and felt "Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace."

To remind himself of what he experienced that night, Pascal wrote a note on a piece of paper which, after his death, was found sewn into his jacket. A decade after his experience, in 1924 Milosz published his first metaphysical work, the long hermetic prose poem Ars Magna, followed three years later in 1927 by The Arcana. At that point, Milosz abandoned writing poetry for a decade, returning to it only once, in 1936, to write his last poem, "Psalm of the Morning Star."

For many of Milosz's admirers, this transition from poet to metaphysician was a disaster. Milosz himself believed that everything he had written up till then was a mere preparation for the mystical vision it was his

destiny to communicate. Although there is a distinct shift in voice from the more melancholy, slightly cynical late-Romanticism of his early work, and his later, hermetic tone, Czeslaw Milosz is correct in seeing in this development a continual growth, rather than a radical change of direction. In many ways, what Milosz in his hermetic works did is to bring the concern of the early Romantics in line with the latest discoveries of science. In Ars Magna and The Arcana we find a wedding of Einstein and Swedenborg.

The metaphysics of Ars Magna and The Arcana is difficult to explain, even to readers familiar with the mystical tradition to which it belongs; after reading the poems several times, I'm not sure I even understand it myself. Perhaps the simplest approach is to see Milosz as the inheritor of the Romantic struggle against the by-now triumphant materialist account of the universe. With Blake, Milosz saw in Newton's idea of an abstract, absolute space and time the source of the satanic mills that blackened the early 19th century skies. For Newton, space is simply infinite empty extension, with planets, stars and galaxies mere clumps of matter, floating in the void. The same is also true of time, which is another kind of extension. For Milosz, this vision of an infinite empty space and an eternal, neutral time, is the very vision of Hell; it is, as in Blake, the fallen world humanity entered having been jettisoned from Paradise. Such a void, in which humanity appears the merest speck, if at all, makes meaningless any sense of value, any notion of the good, true and beautiful; or, at best, it limits these to purely utilitarian terms. What Milosz found important in Einstein - and what led him to believe that through his work there emerged the possibility of healing the split between the inner human world and the outer mechanical one (again, another characteristic of Hell) - was his discovery that space and time were relative to the observer. This did away with Newton's abstract space, and, at least to Milosz, returned humanity to the centre of the universe, a theme common to the hermetic tradition. Milosz claimed that until his illumination, he had only a superficial acquaintance with hermetic literature. What is known is that after his experience, Milosz began a deep and thorough study of the entire corpus of esoteric writings, looking for confirmation of his vision.

He found it in many places, but most of all in Swedenborg. For Swedenborg, as for Blake, Goethe, Paracelsus and other hermetic thinkers, man is the central mystery of the world, and is not, as in the rationalist view, one chance creature among others in an accidental universe. For Swedenborg, the universe in fact is man, cosmic man, the Anthropos, Adam Kadmon of the kabbalists. For Milosz, Einstein, in his way - and of whose works at the time of his experience he had not the slightest idea - was only putting into contemporary mathematical language the insights known to hermeticists for centuries.

Yet all of this sounds fairly abstract when compared to Milosz's calm yet almost hallucinatory prose:

On the fourteenth of December, nineteen hundred and fourteen, at about eleven o'clock in the evening, in a state of perfect wakefulness, having said my prayer and meditated my daily verse from the Bible, I suddenly felt, without the slightest amazement, a completely unexpected change occurring in my whole body. At first I noticed that I was granted a power, until that day unknown, of soaring freely through space; and a moment later I found myself near the summit of a mighty mountain shrouded with bluish mists of indescribable fineness and sweetness. From this moment on, I was spared the effort of rising with my own movement. For the mountain, tearing its roots out of the earth, carried me rapidly towards unimaginable heights, towards nebulous regions silent and streaked by immense flashes of lightning.

Milosz's ascent, however, did not last long. And when the movement stopped, he could see:

... a very dense cloud, which, despite its coppery tinge, I compared to the freshly discharged seed of man. Above the top of my skull, a little to the rear, a glow then appeared like that of a torch reflected by still water or an old mirror.

During these visions, Milosz was in complete command of his senses, and felt neither dread, nor curiosity nor amazement. Yet:

an instant later, from regions which I knew were far behind me, a sort of gigantic and reddish egg shot forth, hurled with extraordinary force into space, it reached the line of my forehead in an instant; and there, suddenly changing its movement and colour, it became round and small, turned into a golden lamp, lowered itself until it brushed my face, climbed again, grew in size, recovered its oval shape of an angelic sun,

stopped not far above my forehead and looked deeply into my eyes.'

This was the "spiritual sun" he told Carlos Larronde he had seen.

It is impossible to do more than touch on Milosz's 20th century contribution to the hermetic tradition. Ars Magna and The Arcana are extremely difficult works; the "Exegetic Notes" to The Arcana alone run some hundred pages. He was in many ways a man out of time; his spiritual milieu was that of Saint-Martin, Cagliostro, Goethe, the Enlightenment Illuminati discussed in the first section of this book. Like Swedenborg, he combined a mystical sensibility with a practical capability rarely exhibited in poets.

In his last days, Milosz wrote an eccentric interpretation of the Book of Revelations, after having read the work some 50 times over a fortnight. He believed that the year 1944 would see a universal conflagration, and although World War II fell short of this, he had also predicted its arrival several years in advance. He spent his last years at Fontainebleau, where he loved to walk in the gardens and where he displayed an uncommon intimacy with the birds. On one occasion, after an absence of some months, upon his return he was greeted with a chorus of song, "paths, woods and bushes resounded with calls," presenting a "light-headed joy by all kinds of species." His love of his aerial friends was demanding, and on one occasion, after carrying a case of seeds, he collapsed in a faint, falling into the December snow, almost dying. He did die on 2 March 1939. One particular bird he let free in a room reserved for it, and it was only put into its cage at night. On that evening the bird refused to go into its cage, and, Milosz, desperate, attempted to catch it. Finally getting his hands on it after several attempts, but frantic and exhausted after the chase, Milosz collapsed. He was dead. The symbolism will not escape the attentive reader.

Malcolm Lowry

At the summer solstice of 1916, Frater Achad - otherwise known as Charles Stansfeld Jones, a London accountant and devoted student of the occult - stood before his altar in his temple in Vancouver, Canada, and acknowledged a remarkable fact. He had, he realized, undergone a significant transformation. From humble Neophyte in the order of the Argentinum Astrum, or Silver Star, he had metamorphosed into a Master of the Temple. Confirmation of this exalted change came in the form of visitation by the Secret Chiefs who, Achad realized, had called upon him to accept the obligations of his new status. Taking the solemn oath of his new office, Frater Achad swore to fulfil his duties and to work diligently to execute all the responsibilities that were attendant upon him now.

Soon after his experience, Jones telegrammed his mentor in London, with whom he had been carrying on a magical correspondence course, and announced what had happened. Aleister Crowley, the Great Beast and Jones' master, was delighted at the news, but more importantly, he was struck by the remarkable coincidence it seemed to portend. Just nine months previously, with two of his Scarlet Women, Crowley had performed a series of magical operations, the aim of which was to produce a "magical child," an heir to the mysteries inherent in his sacred text, The Book of the Law. Jones' telegram seemed to confirm that Crowley's efforts - which included for the most part having sex in a variety of ways - had been successful. Frater Achad, he felt certain, was the one predicted by the Book, who would come and elucidate its many secrets. Achad, encouraged by his master's delight, embarked on a long and complicated kabbalistic analysis of Crowley's inspired work, which eventually took shape in 1919 as the revelation that God combines within himself both being and non-being.45 This discovery heartened Crowley and, at least for him, cleared up some of the more obscure points in The Book of the Law. Yet, as happened with practically everyone who got involved with him, the Great Beast eventually turned on Frater Achad. The fact, however, that in 1926, Jones went mad could not have helped their relations. During a brief stay in England, Crowley's magical child joined the Roman Catholic Church with the intention of converting it to Crowley's religion of thelema. He then returned to Vancouver where, on a particularly auspicious day, wearing only a rain coat, he flung it open, revealed his nakedness, and announced that he had abandoned the Veil of Illusion.

Frater Achad soon recovered from his mania, and jettisoning Crowley's yolk, declared that Aiwass, the Great Beast's Holy Guardian Angel, was a malignant intelligence. He did not abandon his magical studies though, and hereafter announced that a New Aeon was indeed upon the world, but not the one that Crowley had in mind. Crowley, hearing of Jones's apostasy, realized his journey across the abyss - the necessary prerequisite to becoming a Master of the Temple - had been precipitous, and expelled him from his order. And to make sure that his ex-student learned his lesson, he evoked a handful of demons to destroy him.

Frater Achad's magical career, however, was not over, and his influence would inform two significant occult streams in the 20th century. One would originate in Pasadena, California, and include important figures like Jack Parsons, Robert Heinlein, and L. Ron Hubbard.46 The other would begin closer to home, in Vancouver, and would have a profound effect on Jones' fellow Englishman, Malcolm Lowry, and his important modernist novel, Under the Volcano. Lowry seems an apt inheritor ofJones' wisdom: if anyone had ever entered an abyss, Lowry, with his haunted, demonridden life, full of minor and major tragedies, surely had.47

Malcolm Lowry was born in Birkenhead, Cheshire in 1909 and died in Ripe, Sussex in 1957; much of his life, however, was spent in foreign lands. On the coroner's report the cause of death was given as "misadventure" - he had apparently choked on his own vomit - but the exact details are unknown. After a night of heavy drinking and a violent quarrel with his second wife, Margerie Bonner, Lowry was found dead the next morning, lying in a pool of gin and broken glass. He was not quite forty-eight, and the possibility of suicide cannot be ruled out: a bottle that had contained twenty sodium amytal sleeping pills was found empty. At the time of his death, aside from a few friends and aficionados of his work, Lowry was unknown. Under the Volcano, his major work, is now considered one of the most important novels of the 20th century. It is, by most accounts, a masterwork of modernist technique. It is also a book given over to Lowry's obsessions with occult ideas of initiation, trial, rebirth and the tragic fate of a black magician. The central framework of the book is the Kabbalah, the esoteric meaning of which he learned first hand from his teacher, Charles Stansfeld Jones.

Lowry's first meeting with Jones has all the romantic qualities we would expect from a magical encounter, although, as is clear from Gordon Bowker's exhaustive biography, Lowry, like many drawn to the occult, had a penchant for mythologizing his life." In a letter to his German translator, Clemens ten Holder, Lowry describes how he first came across Crowley's disinherited son. He and his wife Margerie had been living not far from Vancouver in a shack in Dollarton, British Columbia. Here Lowry worked obsessively on several revisions of his novel, which, by this time, had been rejected by twelve publishers. Walking in the forest, and contemplating the growing similarities between the intoxicated Geoffrey Firmin, the ex-British Consul, drinking himself to death in Mexico - Lowry's fictional alter ego - and Faust, Lowry reflected that his tragic hero was "in the position, as it were, of a black magician." If this were so, he thought, "had I not better learn something about what really haunted him? Fatal supposition! Indeed no sooner had I thought that than I actually encountered a strange personage in the forest here, who, ostensibly a canvasser for votes, was in reality just such a magician ... "49Lowry hastened to add that he -Jones - was a white magician and that Lowry himself did not practice the craft. Synchronicities of this sort - to use C.G.Jung's term for `meaningful coincidences' - seem to crowd Lowry's life, as well as his fiction: Under the Volcano can be read as an extended stream of consciousness exercise in the hermetic theme of correspondences.

After that meeting, which more than likely took place in June 1941 - although in the extant correspondence, the first mention of Jones is in a postcard to Lowry's friend Gerald Noxon nearly two years later - Jones returned to Lowry's shack, bringing with him copies of two books he had written: Q.B.L. or the Bride's Reception and The Anatomy of the Body of God. Both dealt with Kabbalah, although Frater Achad's other main interest was the Parsifal legend, his studies in which produced The Chalice of Ecstasy, being the Inmost Secret of PAR- ZIVAL by a Companion of the Holy Grail, a Magical and Qabalistic Interpretation of the Drama of Parzival, published in 1923 by the same small Chicago firm that produced his other works. Jones also brought along a diagram of the Tree of Life, the graphic representation of the ten sephiroth or levels of existence emanating from the unmanifest godhead. Lowry was so taken with this that he asked Jones to teach him everything he knew about Kabbalah. Stan, as Lowry came to call him, agreed, and lent

him a book about the "sacred magic" of Abra-Melin the mage. This was more than likely The Book of the Sacred Magic ofAbra-Melin the Mage, a translation of a manuscript that Samuel Liddell Mathers (later MacGregor), the head of the Golden Dawn when Crowley first joined, had discovered in the Bibliotheque de l'Arsenal in Paris. The text was written by Abraham the Jew in 1458, and recounts Abraham's years as a student of a seer known as Abramelin. Years later, he committed the knowledge he had gained to writing, and this was translated into French sometime in 1700; it was this French translation that Mathers came across. Mathers was not the only one to have known of the book: both Eliphas Levi and Bulwer-Lytton were conversant with it.

The aim of the rituals included in the text is to bring the practitioner to the "knowledge and conversation of his Holy Guardian Angel." To achieve this, the magician must learn how to master the lower demonic forces; legend has it that when Crowley himself attempted the operation - in his magical lodge in Boleskine, near Loch Ness - he failed to do this: hence the shadows that surrounded his later career. In Lowry's case, the demonic voices the mescal inspired Consul hears come straight out ofMathers' text.'°

Lowry and Margerie visited Jones often. Stan lived with his wife Rubina in Deep Cove, a hamlet not far from Dollarton, where they were more or less the resident eccentrics. Aside from his magical pursuits, Jones had a degree in philosophy, was a painter as well as the head of the College Ad Spiritum Sanctum, whose base was located in Chicago. Rubina shared Charles' interest in the occult, and was also a great reader, although she had less enthusiasm for Lowry than her husband had. The two couples became good friends nevertheless, and soon the Lowrys were spending a few evenings a week at Jones's house. There he introduced them to a variety of mystical practices: yoga, the I Ching, astral travel and meditation. Jones believed that the myth of the Holy Grail was the archetype of the quest for hidden knowledge, and more and more Lowry came to agree. Since his childhood he had believed that he was in some way different from others, had been set apart for some special fate, and that, like his predecessors Poe and Baudelaire, he was destined for a life of suffering, through which he would acquire deep spiritual understanding. It was another of those odd coincidences that among the writers Jones introduced to Lowry was Eliphas Levi who, as we've seen, also believed that the true magus must pass through the fires of suffering.

Jones made his impressive occult library available to Lowry, and we get an idea of the kind of world Malcolm was entering by the checklist of occult titles that appears in Under the Volcano. When Hugh, Geoffrey's brother, arrives in Cuernavaca," Mexico, where the novel takes place, and inspects his brother's library, he finds an odd collection:

... on high shelves around the walls: Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie, Serpent and Siva Worship in Central America, there were two long shelves of this, together with the rusty leather bindings and frayed edges of the numerous kabbalistic and alchemical books, though, some looked fairly new, like the Goetia of the Lemegaton of Solomon the King ...52

There were other books as well: the Mahabharata, William Blake, the Upanishads, the Rig Veda, but also Peter Rabbit. " `Everything is to be found in Peter Rabbit,' the Consul liked to say," Hugh recalls: a touch of humour added for leavening, perhaps; but perhaps also a nod to the kabbalistic notion that deep, profound secrets can be found in the simplest text.

By the time Lowry met Jones, he was ready for the initiation. Occult, or at least metaphysical literature was not foreign to him. He was a great reader of Ouspensky and in a letter to his mother-in-law, who shared his esoteric interests, he suggested she read A New Model of the Universe and Tertium Organum; in the same letter he praised J.W. Dunne's An Experiment With Time and spoke highly of Charles Fort's books. He even plagiarized Ouspensky, saying that he has "always believed that, that which impedes the motion of thought is false," a slight paraphrase of Ouspensky's coda to Tertium Organum itself. (In later years he would also repeat Ouspensky's dictum that "If we could put questions rightly, we should know the answers," an insight that finds an odd echo in some of Wittgenstein's aphorisms.53) Ouspensky's speculations on time and eternal recurrence find their way into Lowry's magnum opus, most clearly in the symbolism of the wheel that turns up in several places, most powerfully in the Ferris wheel, which, significantly, at the close of the opening chapter, revolves backwards over the setting for the Consul's trials, a subtle yet striking image of

return.54 Lowry also identified strongly with Ouspensky's description of the Hanged Man from the Tarot, another image of suffering.

In later years, Lowry would visit Haiti and stumble - literally - into the dark world of voodoo. On one occasion he attended a voodoo ceremony that lasted two days and two nights, and returned befuddled with drugs. "The voodoo priest," he wrote to his friend Alfred Erskine, "perhaps recognizing a kindred spirit, has promised to initiate me by fire when I return ... I really would like to be a voodoo priest."ss Although, as is common knowledge, Lowry had frequent and excessive experience of other spirits - alcohol in a variety of forms - he was always keen on making contact with more transcendental kinds. This is something, to his ultimate regret, his fictional counterpart seems to achieve.

A detailed, chapter-by-chapter account of the kabbalistic symbolism that fills Under the Volcano can be found in Perle Epstein's exhaustive study, The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry; Lowry himself offers an apology for it in his long letter to Jonathan Cape, his publisher, defending his use of occult symbols. I can only touch on a few examples of it here.56 The novel depicts the last day in the life of Geoffrey Firmin, an alcoholic ex-British Consul, with an interest in mysticism, especially Kabbalah.57 The day in question is 2 November, the Day of the Dead, the Mexican equivalent of All Soul's Day, when the dead are believed to come back and visit the living. In Geoffrey's case, two of his dead have recently arrived: his brother Hugh, and his ex-wife Yvonne, whose affair with Hugh, compounded by Geoffrey's incurable drinking, precipitated their divorce. Number symbolism saturates the book, as do dozens of other references: like many modernist works, the book is highly allusive, and along with Kabbalah and Ouspensky, into his strange brew Lowry puts German expressionist films (The Hands of Orlac and The Student of Prague, both occult films), Faust, Swedenborg, the Rosicrucians, astrology, alchemy and much more. The action takes place in exactly twelve hours depicted over twelve chapters: along with other references, twelve is an important kabbalistic number. The Tree of Life is used, Lowry tells us, "for poetical purposes because it symbolizes man's spiritual aspiration."Ss The Consul's domain is the Qliphoth, the world of shells and demons, a kind of inverse tree, growing downwards into hell. And while the Consul's alcoholism, manifest in his insatiable thirst for mescal, is clearly Lowry's own (he is throughout the book perfectamente borracho, perfectly drunk) his magical preoccupations raise the novel beyond the realism of Charles Jackson's The Lost Weekend, published while Lowry was engaged in one of his obsessive revisions. "William James," he told Jonathan Cape, "would certainly agree with me when I say that the agonies of the drunkard find their most accurate poetic analogue in the agonies of the mystic who has abused his powers."5" Although Lowry was briefly on the wagon when they met, Charles Stansfeld Jones was sure to have cautioned him that in Kabbalah, the misuse of magical powers is compared to drunkenness. At any rate, one thing he did tell him was that "a black magician who fell into the abyss was in the unenviable position of having all the elements in the universe against him."" Throughout his life, Lowry had an intimation of this, and perhaps in the end he, like the Consul, recognized that the only way to escape this fate was to leave the universe itself.

At the beginning of the novel, Geoffrey's friend M. Laruelle, with whom Yvonne (modelled on Lowry's first wife) has had an affair as well, reads a letter Geoffrey wrote to Yvonne but never sent. ". . . do you see me as still working on the book," the Consul asks his lost Shekinah, the female spiritual principle of the Kabbalah:

still trying to answer such questions as: Is there an ultimate reality, external, conscious, and ever-present, etc ... Or do you find me between Mercy and Understanding, between Chesed and Binah, ... my equilibrium, and equilibrium is all, precarious - balancing, teetering over the awful unbridgeable void, the all-but-unretraceable path of God's lightning back to God? As if I were in Chesed! More like the Qliphoth.b'

Earlier in the letter, Geoffrey tells Yvonne that, "this is how I sometimes think of myself, as a great explorer who has discovered some extraordinary land from which he can never return to give his knowledge to the world: but the name of this land is hell. "12 Like Rimbaud, another believer in the spiritual value of suffering, Lowry did spend his season in the underworld. In Under the Volcano he passed on to those more fortunate than himself a moving account of its terrifying terrain.

Notes

1 A Centenary Pessoa, Eugenio Lisboa and L.C. Taylor, editors (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997) p. 17.

2 "The modern period" is admittedly a vague term and, given our own placement in a "post-postmodern" era, doubly doubtful. Exactly when and where modernism began is debatable and, in the sense of providing a starting date for a well-defined literary and artistic movement, it's more than likely an impossible question to answer. The first non-representational painting is said to be Kandinsky's "First Abstract Watercolour" (1910), although some art historians give the credit to the Czech Frantisek Kupka. Literary modernism is said to begin with Apollonaire, and its debatable whether Mahler's Ninth Symphony is the last work of late-romanticism or an early atonal effort; indeed, for critics like Charles Rosen, Beethoven's late string quartets embody practically all the elements to be found in Schoenberg's less accessible works. For my purposes I'm considering modern the period beginning slightly before World War I, and continuing on until, say, the 1950s and the rise of Beat poetry, although all of the works I will here examine were written before then.

3 The `crisis of the word' experienced in the early 20th century took on many forms, perhaps none more emblematic than the philosopher Wittgenstein's dictum that, "Of that which we cannot speak we must remain silent." Wittgenstein's silence was felt by many others: Karl Kraus, Hugo von Hoffmanstahl, Ernst Bloch, Robert Musil, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Maeterlink, Hermann Broch, Franz Kafka and, in a later form, Samuel Beckett. For a good account of this `retreat from the word' see George Steiner's Language and Silence (1967) and Extraterritorial (1972).

4 Schoenberg also believed in a kind of number mysticism on which he based a system of angelology. It took on a troubling form, however, in his fear of the number thirteen. Schoenberg was born on 13 September 1874 and died on 13 July 1951.

5 Cage's particular occult interest was the I Ching or Book of Changes, a Chinese form of divination employing yarrow sticks or, in a more simple form, coins. For one composition, Cage is reported to have throw his I Ching coins 16,000 times.

6 Had space allowed, I would have liked to have included separate sections on both David Lindsay and John Cowper Powys, two of the most important novelists working in the gnostic tradition, although neither of them could be considered modernists. Powys, most famous for his Dorset Quartet, including the mammoth A Glastonbury Romance, not only professed a profound magical philosophy of life - espoused in his many nonfiction works - but apparently possessed some occult powers himself. In his magnificent Autobiography, Powys writes of his evil eye, which caused him no small measure of concern, as well as his experiences of bi-location, one of which involved the novelist Theodore Dreiser. Lindsay, best know for his masterpiece A Voyage to Arcturus, though not an occultist per se, nevertheless wrote perhaps the most metaphysical novel in the English language, his late, unfinished The Witch. In Devil's Tor, Lindsay took the theme of the reincarnated avatar and wed it to notions of pre-civilization goddess culture (decades before this became popular in the 1980s and 90s) and created a powerful philosophical drama, as well as a gripping occult thriller.

7 This is not inclusive of writers who took occultism or the supernatural as their central theme, a criterion I have tried to maintain, with a few exceptions, throughout this study.

8 For more on Eliot and Pound see Leon Surrette's highly dismissive study The Birth of Modernism (Montreal & Kingston: Mcgill - Queens University Press, 1993).

9 Pessoa and Benjamin have much in common. Besides their mutual penchant for the fragment - Benjamin's Arcades Project and Pessoa's Book of Disquiet are both works that refused completion - Pessoa and Benjamin shared an equal ineptitude with dealing with reality or the necessities of life. Both lived more in books than in the world, and both had great difficulties maintaining relationships with women. Both shared an interest in forms of occultism (Kabbalah and graphology for Benjamin) and both died at a tragically young age, Pessoa at 47, Benjamin 48. The valise Benjamin hauled across the Pyrenees in his attempt to reach Spain held the contents of his monumentally unfinished magnum opus. A very readable

fictional account of this disastrous venture can be found in Jay Parini's Benjamin's Crossing (1996).

10 Although a commonplace childhood experience, the vividness of Pessoa's invented friends bears comparison to the similar early pastime of the psychologist C.G. Jung. In his childhood, Jung became convinced of the reality of a separate self, whom he called Personality No. 2, an old gentleman of the 18th century, who dressed in buckles and frock coat, and who was possessed of an uncommon wisdom and insight. Jung became so immersed in the world of No. 2 that he came to believe he had been the gentleman in a past life. For detractors of Jung, this is early evidence of his later psychosis; for his followers, it was a manifestation of the autonomous contents of the psyche. Following his break with Freud, Jung underwent a shattering mental breakdown in which he had visions and, most importantly for his later ideas, held conversations with autonomous personalities resident in his own mind.

11 Fernando Pessoa Selected Poems (London: Penguin Books, 2000) p. 11.

12 A Centenary Pessoa p. 262.

13 Selected Poems p. 12.

14 Ricardo Reis is the subject of a novel by the contemporary Portuguese writer Jose Saramago, The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis (1991).

15 The Selected Prose of Fernando Pessoa translated by Richard Zenith (New York: Grove Press, 2001) p. 256.

16 Alvaro de Campos was another compensatory figure. A world traveller, he smoked opium, studied naval engineering at Glasgow, voyaged to the Orient, drank absinthe and wore a monocle. On occasions, de Campos would appear in Pessoa's stead at social gatherings, and in 1929 he broke off Pessoa's single romantic liason, writing to the girl and telling her to flush any idea of their union "down the toilet."

17 Selected Prose pp. 103 and 110.

18 Ibid. pp. 101-102. The shapes, designs and symbols Pessoa saw suggest that this was a hypnagogic experience.

19 Selected Poems translated by John Grim, p. 70.

20 See Marco Pasi's, "The Influence of Aleister Crowley on Fernando Pessoa's Esoteric Writings" in Gnostics 3: Esoterisme, Gnoses & Imaginaire Symbolique (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2001) pp. 693-711.

21 Selected Prose p. 259.

22 Fernando Pessoa The Book of Disquiet translated by Richard Zenith (London: Penguin Books, 2001) pp. 217, 222-223.

23 Rene Daumal The Powers of the Word translated by Mark Poliz- zoti (San Francisco: City Lights, 1991) p. 164.

24 Something P.D. Ouspensky engaged in a generation earlier. See "On the Study of Dreams and Hypnotism" in A New Model of the Universe (New York: Knopf, 1969) pp. 242-273.

25 The Powers of the Word p. 6.

26 Rene Daumal Mount Analogue (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1986) p. 13.

27 Oddly, another mystical novel dealing with a mountain, Thomas Mann's The Magic Mountain, revolves around the fate of its tubercular characters. Daumal was a keen alpinist, yet the magic mountain he sought was strictly metaphorical. Had he taken his doctor's advice, however, and entered a sanatorium like Hans Castorp, he might have lived long enough to complete Mount Analogue. For a study of the alchemical and other occult motifs in Mann's novel, see Wouter J. Hanegraaf "Ironic Esotericism: Alchemy and Grail Mythology in Thomas Mann's Zauberberg", Esoterisme, Gnoses & Imaginaire Symbolique (above) pp. 575-594.

28 Ibid. p.81 Daumal's description here is reminiscent of Poe's earlier symbolic voyage "A Descent into the Maelstrom."

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid. p. 82.

31 Ibid. pp. 78-79.

32 Ibid. p. 84.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid. p. 104.

35 Among other responsibilities, Milosz was a leading member of the Lithuanian delegation to the League of Nations, and for many years was Charge d'Affaires of the Lithuanian Legation in Paris.

36 O.V. de L. Milosz The Noble Traveller: The Life and Writings of O. V. de L. Milosz, Christopher Bamford, editor. (West Stockbridge, MA: Lindisfarne Press, 1985) p. 440.

37 Ibid. p. 449.

38 Ibid. p. 50.

39 Ibid. p. 339.

40 Ibid. p. 438.

41 Ibid. p. 439.

42 See the English translation by Belle N. Burke (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1994).

43 Although his interests included alchemy, number theory and other aspects of the western esoteric tradition, Rene Schwaller de Lubicz is most known today for his unorthodox theories about Egyptian civilization and the construction of the Temple of Luxor. In recent years Schwaller de Lubicz's ideas have received renewed interest through the work of Graham Hancock, who based his bestselling series of books about the precursors of Egyptian civilization on de Lubicz's remark that the Sphinx was much older than orthodox Egyptologists suggest.

44 From "Epistle to Storge" in Ars Magna, translated by Czeslaw Milosz in The Noble Traveller pp. 244-245.

45 In Hebrew, AL means God, LA, not. For Jones, this meant that the reflection of God is Not. Kabbalistically this maybe interesting, but the idea is not new. The Gnostics spoke of the Pleroma, a kind of negative world existing (or not-existing) outside the manifest world; the kabbalists themselves speak of the En Sof, a similarly non-manifest source of being. Later proponents of the notion included the alchemist and theosophist Jacob Boehme, and the philosopher Hegel, whose dialectic begins with the initial opposition of being and non-being. As mentioned earlier, Hegel was a reader of Boehme.

46 In the 1930s, Frater Achad started a magical organization of his own, and one member, Wilfred T. Smith, carried his teaching to California, where he started a group called the Agape Lodge. This would later include John (Jack) Whitesides Parson, a scientist at Pasadena's famous jet Propulsion Laboratory. Agape Lodge was ultimately under Crowley's guidance, and after Smith abused his position (in a very Crowleyesque way, by seducing Parsons's wife) he was expelled and Parsons given control. Parson's Pasadena home became the site of magical rituals, including sex and drugs. L. Ron Hubbard claimed to have been sent to investigate the black magic ring by Naval Intelligence. He seduced Parsons' wife as well, and also absorbed enough about Crowley's ideas to use them as a foundation for his Church of Scientology. Hubbard was also a pulp science fiction writer at the time, and knew Heinlein, who visited Parsons' home on a few occasions. Many of Crowley's ideas inform his influential novel, Stranger in a

Strange Land. For more on Parsons and Hubbard, see my Turn Off Your Mind: The Mystic Sixties and the Dark Side of the Age of Aquarius.

47 Lowry would have another indirect link with Crowley. As mentioned earlier, his friend and drinking partner, Dylan Thomas, was discovered by the poet Victor Neuberg, with whom Crowley performed a series of homosexual magical acts in Paris and North Africa.

48 Gordon Bowker Pursued by Furies: A Life of Malcolm Lowry (London: Harper Collins, 1993).

49 Malcolm Lowry Sursum Corda! The Colleted Letters of Malcolm Lowry, Volume Two 1946-1957 edited by Sherrill E. Grace (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996) p. 356.

50 Oddly Crowley himself was introduced to the work by another Jones, George Cecil Jones, the chemist and magician who brought him into the Golden Dawn.

51 Called Quauhnahuac in the novel, Cuernavaca, "the horn of the cow," has a curious occult history. Known traditionally as an area familiar to magicians and sorcerers, in the early 1960s it was the setting for Timothy Leary's initial psilocybin mushroom experiments, his first taste of the "food of the gods" being supplied by a local curandero, or medicine man. Later, it became the centre for John Star Cooke's `Psychedelic Rangers', a group of dedicated LSD enthusiasts who attempted to dose a variety of influential people with the drug. Cooke was known for his psychedelic seances, many of which were attended by prominent figures in the 60s counterculture. He had also become a kind of celebrity on the pop occultism circuit, through the popularity of a Tarot deck he designed. For more on him and Leary, who modelled his career on Aleister Crowley, see my Turn Off Your Mind: The Mystic Sixties and the Dark Side of the Age of Aquarius.

52 Malcolm Lowry Under The Volcano (London: Penguin Books, 1985) p. 218.

53 See Sursum Corda! pp. 293, 304.

54 And also of time, in the form of a clock. The opening chapter takes place a year after the events of the novel, with one of the supporting characters thinking back over the Consul's sad fate. He is, then, returning to the past. Lowry more than likely didn't know of Ouspensky's novel of recurrence Strange Life of Ivan Osokin, in which the central character is sent back in time to relive his life again, but his imagery here suits it perfectly.

55 Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry edited by Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (London; Penguin Books, 1985) pp. 139-140.

56 This letter can be found in the Penguin edition of the novel.

57 The novel also has a strong political element, which space has not allowed me to explore, and through the Consul's irrevocable descent, depicts the collapse of humanism and the rise of fascism. Firmin, a 20th century Faust, is modern man playing with dangerous forces he does not understand. Lowry believed that in Chapter Ten, with its long list of all the elements that were "against" Geoffrey, he had in some way anticipated the atomic bomb.

58 Under the Volcano p. 16.

59 Ibid. p. 23

60 Sursum Corda! pp. 356-357.

61 Under the Volcano p. 84.

62 Ibid. pp. 81-82.

Part 2

Selected Texts

From The Cloud upon the Sanctuary

KARL VON ECKARTHAUSEN

There is no age more remarkable to the quiet observer than our own. Everywhere there is a fermentation in the mind, as in the heart of man; everywhere there is a battle between light and darkness, between exploded thoughts and living ideas, between powerless wills and living active force; in fine, everywhere there is war between animal man and growing spiritual man.

It is said that we live in the age of light, but it would be truer to say that we are living in that of twilight; here and there a luminous ray pierces the mist of darkness, but does not light to full clearness either our reason or our heart. Men are not of one mind, scientists dispute, and where there is discord, truth is not yet apprehended.

The most important objects for humanity are still undetermined. No one is agreed either on the principle of reason, on the principle of morality, or on the cause of will. This proves that though we are dwelling in a reputed age of light, we do not well understand what emanates from our hearts and what from our heads. Probably we should reach this knowledge much sooner if we did not imagine that we have the torch of science already in our hands, or if we would cast a look on our weakness and recognise that we need a higher illumination. We live in the times of idolatry of the intellect; we place a common light upon the altar and we loudly proclaim that here and now is the aurora, that everywhere daylight is really about to appear, and that the world is emerging more and more from obscurity into the full day of perfection, through the arts, sciences, cultured tastes, and even by a purer understanding of religion.

Poor mankind! To what eminence have you raised the happiness of man? Has there ever been an age which has counted so many victims to humanity as the present? Has there ever been an age in which immorality and egotism have been greater or more dominant than in this one? The tree is known by its fruits. Insensate beings! With your imaginary natural reason, from whence have you the light by which you are so willing to enlighten others? Are not all your ideas borrowed from your senses, which do not give you the reality but merely its phenomena? Is it not true that in time and space all knowledge is but relative? Is it not true that all which we call reality is also relative, for absolute truth is not to be found in the phenomenal world. Thus your natural reason does not possess the true essence, but only an appearance of truth and light; and the more this semblance increases and spreads, the more the essence of light fades inwardly; the man is lost in the apparent and gropes vainly after dazzling phantasmal images devoid of actuality.

The philosophy of our age raises the natural intellect into independent objectivity, gives it judicial power, exempts it from any superior authority, makes it autonomous, converting it into divinity by closing all harmony and communication with God; and deified Reason, which has no other law but its own, is to govern Man and make him happy! Can darkness spread the light? ... Can poverty dispense wealth? Is death capable of giving life?

It is truth which leads man to happiness. Can you confer truth?

That which you call truth is a form of conception empty of real matter; its knowledge is acquired from without, through the senses, and the understanding co-ordinates these by observed synthetic relationship into science or opinion.

You abstract from the Scriptures and Tradition their moral, theoretical and practical truth; but as individuality is the principle of your intelligence, and as egotism is the incentive to your will, you do not see, by your light, the moral law which dominates, or you repel it with your will. It is to this length that the light of today has penetrated. Individuality under the cloak of false philosophy is a child of corruption.

Who can pretend that the sun is full zenith if no bright rays illuminate the earth, and no warmth vitalises vegetation? If the wisdom does not benefit man, if love does not make him happy, but very little has been

done for him on the whole.

Oh! If only natural man, that is, sensuous man, would learn that the principle of his reason and the incentive of his will are only his individuality, and that on this account he is miserable, he would then seek within himself for a higher principle, and he would thereby approach that source which alone can communicate this principle to all, because it is wisdom in its essential substance ...

But the eye of the man of sensuous perception only is closed firmly to the fundamental basis of all that is true and all that is transcendental.

Even the reason which many would fain raise to the throne of legislative authority is only reason of the senses, whose light differs from that of transcendental reason, as does the phosphorescent glimmer of decayed wood from the glories of sunshine.

Absolute truth does not exist for sensuous man; it exists only for interior and spiritual man who possesses a suitable sensorium; or, to speak more correctly, who possesses an interior organ to receive the absolute truth of the transcendental world, a spiritual faculty which cognises spiritual objects as objectively and naturally as the exterior senses perceive external phenomena.

This interior faculty of the man spiritual, this sensorium for the metaphysical world, is unfortunately not yet known to those who cognise only on the external, for it is a mystery of the kingdom of God.

The current incredulity towards everything which is not cognised objectively by our senses explains the present misconception of truths which are, of all, most important to man.

But how can this be otherwise? In order to see one must have eyes, to hear one must have ears. Every apparent object requires its appropriate sensorium and it is this sensorium which is closed in most men. Hence they judge the metaphysical world through the intelligence of their senses, even as the blind imagine colours and the deaf judge tones without the suitable instruments ...

We must therefore have a sensorium fitted for such communication, an organised and spiritual sensorium, a spiritual and interior faculty able to receive this light; but it is close as I have said to most men by the incrustation of their senses.

Such an interior organ is the intuitive sense of the transcendental world, and until this intuitive sense is effective in us we can have no certainly of more lofty truths. This organism has been naturally inactive since the Fall, which relegated man to the world of physical sense. The gross matter which envelops the interior sensorium is a film which veils the internal eye, and prevents the exterior eye from seeing into spiritual realms. This same matter muffles our internal hearing, so that we are deaf to the sounds of the metaphysical world; it so paralyses our spiritual speech that we can scarcely stammer words of sacred import, words which we pronounced formerly, and by virtue of which we held authority over the elements and external nature.

The opening of this spiritual sensorium is the mystery of the New Man the mystery of Regeneration, and of the vital union between God and man it is the noblest object of religion on earth, of that religion whose sublime goal is none other than to unite men with God in Spirit and in Truth...

It is quite true that with new senses we can acquire the perception of further reality. This reality exists already, but it is not known to us, because we lack the organ by which to cognise it. One must not lay blame on the percept, but on the receptive organ.

With, however, the development of the new organ we have a new perception, a sense of new reality. In its absence the spiritual world cannot exist for us, because the organ rendering it objective to us is not developed. In its unfolding, the curtain is all at once raised, the impenetrable veil is torn away, the cloud before the Sanctuary lifts, a new world suddenly exists for us, scales fall from the eyes, and we are transported from the phenomenal world to the regions of truth .. .

A great many men have no more idea of the development of the inner sensorium than they have of the true

and objective life of the spirit, which they neither perceive nor forecast in any manner. Hence it is impossible for them to know that one can comprehend the spiritual and transcendental, and can thus be raised to the supernatural, even to the vision thereof.

The great and true work of building the Temple consists solely in destroying the miserable Adamic hut and in erecting a divine temple; this means, in other words, to develop in us the interior sensorium, or the organ to receive God. After this process, the metaphysical and incorruptible principle rules over the terrestrial, and man begins to live, not any longer in the principle of self-love, but in the Spirit and in the Truth, of which he is the Temple ... Therein are those great mysteries of which our human philosophy does not dream, the key to which is not to be found in scholastic science.

Meanwhile, a more advanced school has always existed to which the deposition of all science has been confided ... the society of the Elect, which has continued from the first day of creation to the present time; its members, it is true, are scattered all over the world, but they have always been united by one spirit and one truth; they have had but one knowledge, a single source of truth, one lord, one doctor and one master, in whom resides substantially the whole plentitude of God, who also alone initiates them into the high mysteries of Nature and the Spiritual World.

This community of light has been called from all time the invisible and interior Church, or the most ancient of all communities, of which we will speak more fully in the next letter.

This community of light has existed since the first day of the world's creation, and its duration will be to the end of time. It is the society of those elect who know the Light in the Darkness and separate what is pure therein.

This community possesses a School, in which all who thirst for knowledge are instructed by the Spirit of Wisdom itself; and all the mysteries of God and of nature are preserved therein for the children of light. Perfect knowledge of God, of nature and of humanity are the objects of instruction in this school. It is thence that all truths penetrate into the world; herein is the School of Prophets and of all who search for wisdom; it is in this community alone that truth and the explanation of all mystery is to be found. It is the most hidden of communities, yet it possesses members gathered from many orders; of such is this school. From all time there has been an exterior school based on the interior one, of which it is but the outer expression. From all time, therefore, there has been a hidden assembly, a society of the Elect, of those who sought for and had the capacity for light, and this interior society was called the interior Sanctuary or Church. All that the external Church possesses in symbol, ceremony or rite is the letter which expresses externally the spirit and the truth residing in the interior Sanctuary..

The interior Church was formed immediately after the fall of man, and received from God at first-hand the revelation of those means by which fallen humanity could be raised again to its rights and delivered from its misery. It received the primitive charge of all revelation and mystery; it received the key of true science, both divine and natural.

But, when men multiplied, the frailty of man and his weakness necessitated an exterior society which veiled the interior one, and concealed the spirit and the truth in the letter. The people at large were not capable of comprehending high interior truth, and the danger would have been too great in confiding that which was of all most holy to incapable people. Therefore, inward truths were wrapped in external and visible ceremonies, so that men, by the perception of the outer, which is the symbol of the interior, might by degrees be enabled to safely approach the interior spiritual truths ...

This Sanctuary remained changeless, though external religion received in the course of time and circumstances varied modifications, and became divorced from the interior truths which can alone preserve the letter. The profane idea of wishing to "secularize" all that is Christian, and to Christianise all that is political, changed the exterior edifice, and covered with the shadow of death all that reposed within it of light and life. Hence rose divisions and heresies, and the spirit of Sophistry ready to expound the letter when it had already lost the essence of truth ...

In the midst of all this, truth reposed inviolable in the inner Sanctuary. Faithful to the spirit of truth ... the

members of the interior Church lived in silence, but in real activity, and united the science of the temple of the ancient alliance with the spirit of the great Saviour of man ... waiting humbly the great moment when the Lord will assemble His community in order to give every dead letter external force and life.

This illuminated community has been through time the true school of God's spirit, and considered as a school, it has ... its degrees for successive development to higher altitudes.

The first and lowest degree consists in the moral good ... The means by which the spirit of this school acts are called inspirations.

The second degree consists in that rational intellectuality by which the understanding of the man of virtue ... is crowned with wisdom and the light of knowledge, and the means by which the spirit uses to produce this are called interior illumination.

The third and highest degree is the entire opening of the our inner sensorium, by which the inner man attains the objective vision of real and metaphysical verities ... the means which the spirit uses to this end are real visions . . .

This school of wisdom has been for ever most secretly hidden from the world, because it is invisible and submissive solely to Divine Governance.

It has never been exposed to the accidents of time and to the weakness of man ...

By this school were developed the germs of all the sublime sciences, which were next received by external schools, were then clothed in other forms, and sometimes degenerated therein.

This society of sages communicated, according to time and circumstances, unto the exterior societies their symbolic hieroglyphs, in order to attract external man to the great truths of the interior ...

In this interior society man finds wisdom and therewith the All - not the wisdom of this world ... but true wisdom, and men obedient thereto ...

We must not, however, imagine that this society resembles any secret order, meeting at certain times, choosing its leaders and members, united by special objects. All associations, be these what they may, can but come after this interior illuminated circle, which society knows none of the formalities belonging to the outer rings, the work of man. In this kingdom of power the outward forms cease ...

... the chief himself, does not invariably know all the members, but the moment when it is the will of God that they should be brought into communication he finds them unfailingly in the world and ready to work for the end in view.

This community has no outside barriers ... If it be necessary that true members should meet together, they find and recognise each other with perfect certainty. No disguise can be used, neither hypocrisy nor dissimulation could hide the characteristic qualities of this society, because they are too genuine. All illusion is gone, and things appear in their true form.

No one member can choose another, unanimous choice is required. All men are called, the called may be chosen, if they become ripe for entrance.

Any one can look for the entrance, and any man who is within can teach another to seek for it; but only he who is ripe can arrive inside ...

Worldly intelligence seeks this Sanctuary in vain; in vain also do the efforts of malice strive to penetrate these great mysteries; all is undecipherable to him who is not prepared; he can see nothing, read nothing in the interior.

He who is ripe is joined to the chain, perhaps often where he thought least likely, and at a point of which he knew nothing himself.

Seeking to become ripe should be the effort of him who loves wisdom.

But there are methods by which ripeness is attained, for in this holy communion is the primitive storehouse of the most ancient and original science of the human race, with the primitive mysteries also of all science. It is the unique and really illuminated community which is in possession of the key to all mystery, which knows the centre and source of nature and creation. It is a society which unites superior power to its own, and includes members from more than one world. It is the society whose members form a theocratic republic, which one day will be the Regent Mother of the whole World.

From The Secret Doctrine

H.P. BLAVATSKY

In Seven Stanzas translated from the Book of Dzyan.

Stanza I

1. The eternal parent wrapped in her ever invisible robes had slumbered again for seven eternities.

2. Time was not, for it lay asleep in the infinite bosom of duration.

3. Universal mind was not, for there were no Ah-Hi to contain it.

4. The seven ways to bliss were not. The great causes of misery were not, for there was no one to produce and get ensnared by them.

5. Darkness alone filled the boundless all, for father, mother and son were once more one, and the son had not awakened yet for the new wheel, and his pilgrimage thereon.

6. The seven sublime lords and the seven truths had ceased to be, and the universe, the son of necessity, was immersed in Paranishpana, to be outbreathed by that which is and yet is not. Naught was.

7. The causes of existence had been done away with; the visible that was and the invisible that is rested in eternal non-being - the one being.

8. Alone, the one form of existence stretched boundless, infinite, causeless in dreamless sleep; and life pulsated unconscious in universal space, throughout that all-presence which is sensed by the opened eye of the Dangma.

9. But where was the Dangma when the Alaya of the universe was in Paramartha and the Great Wheel was Anupadaka?

Stanza II

1. Where were the builders, the luminous sons of Manvantaric dawn?

In the unknown darkness in their Ah-Hi Paranishpana. The producers of form from no-form - the root of the world - the Devimatri Svabhavat, rested in the bliss of non-being.

2. Where was silence? Where the ears to sense it? No, there was neither silence nor sound; naught save ceaseless eternal breath, which knows itself not.

3. The hour had not yet struck; the ray had not yet flashed into the germ; the Matripadma had not yet swollen.

4. Her heart had not yet opened for the one ray to enter, thence to fall, as three into four, into the lap of Maya.

5. The seven sons were not yet born from the web of light. Darkness alone was father-mother, Svabhavat; and Svabhavat was in darkness.

6. These two are the germ, and the germ is one. The universe was still concealed in the divine thought and the divine bosom.

Stanza III

1. The last vibration of the seventh eternity thrills through infinitude. The mother swells, expanding from within without, like the bud of the lotus.

2. The vibration sweeps along, touching with its swift wing the whole universe and the germ that dwelleth in darkness: the darkness that breathes over the slumbering waters of life.

3. Darkness radiates light, and light drops one solitary ray into the mother-deep.

The ray shoots through the virgin egg, the ray causes the eternal egg to thrill, and drop the non-eternal germ, which condenses into the world-egg.

4. Then the three fall into the four. The radiant essence becomes seven inside, seven outside. The luminous egg, which in itself is three, curdles and spreads in milk-white curds throughout the depths of the mother, the root that grows in the depths of the ocean of life.

5. The root remans, the light remains, the curds remain, and still Oeaohoo is one.

6. The root of life was in every drop of the ocean of immortality, and the ocean was radiant light, which was fire, and heat and motion. Darkness vanished and was no more; it disappeared in its own essense, the body of fire and water or father and mother.

7. Behold, 0 Lanoo! The radiant child of the two, the unparallelled refulgent glory: bright space son of dark space, which emerges from the depths of the great dark waters. It is Oeaohoo the younger. He shines forth as the son, he is the blazing divine dragon wisdom; the one is four, and four takes to itself three, and the union produces the Sapta, in who are the seven which become the Tridasa (or the hosts and the multitudes). Behold him lifting the veil and unfurling it from east to west. He shuts out the above, and leaves the below to be seen as the great illusion. He marks the places for the shining ones, and turns the upper into a shoreless sea of fire, and the one manifested into the great waters.

8. Where was the germ and where was now darkness? Where is the spirit of the flame that burns in thy lamp, oh Lanoo? The germ is that, and that is light, the white brilliant son of the dark hidden father.

9. Light is cold flame, and flame is fire, and fire produces heat, which yields water: the water of life in the great mother.

10. Father-mother spin in a web whose upper end is fastened to spirit. The light of the one darkness.

And the lower one to its shadowy end, matter; and this web is the universe spun of the two substances made in one, which is Svabhavat.

11. It expands when the breath of fire is upon it; it contracts when the breath of the mother touches it. Then the sons dissociate and scatter, to return into their mother's bosom and the end of the great day, and re-become one with her; when it is cooling it becomes radiant, and the sons expand and contract through their own selves and hearts; they embrace infinitude.

12. Then Svabhavat sends Fohat to harden the atoms. Each is a part of the web. Reflecting the self-existent lord like a mirror, each becomes in turn a world.

Stanza IV

1. Listen, ye sons of the earth, to your instructors, the sons of the fire. Learn there is neither first nor last, for

all is one: number issued from no number.

2. Learn what we who descended from the primordial seven, we who are born from the primordial flame, I have learnt from our fathers.

3. From the effulgency of light, the ray of the ever-darkness, sprung in space the reawakened energies; the one from the egg, the six and the five. Then the three, the one, the four, the one, the five. The twice seven the sum total. And these are the essences, the flames, the elements, the builders, the numbers, the arupa, the rupa and the force of divine man, the sun total. And from the divine man emanated the forms, the sparks, the scared animals and the messengers of the sacred fathers withing the holy four. .

4. This was the army of the voice, the divine mother of the seven. The sparks of the seven are subject to, and the servants of the first, the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth and the seventh of the seven. These sparks are called spheres, triangles, cubes, lines and modellers; for this stands the eternal Nidana, the Oeaohoo, which is:

5. "Darkness," the boundless or the no-number Adi-nidana Svabhavat:

1. The Adi-Sanat, the number, for he is one.

II. The voice of the Lord Svabhavat, the numbers, for he is one and nine.

III. The "Formless Square." And these three enclosed within the 0 are the sacred four; and the ten are the Arupa universe. Then come the "sons," the seven fighters, the one, the eighth left out, and his breathe which is the lightmaker.

6. Then the second seven who are the Lipika, produced by the three. The rejected son is one; the "sun-sons" are countless.

Stanza V

1. The primordial seven, the first seven breaths of the dragon of wisdom, produce in their turn from their holy circumgyrating breaths the fiery whirlwind.

2. They make of him the messenger of their will; the Dzyu becomes Fohat, the swift son of the divine sons whose sons are the Lipika, runs circular errands. Fohat is the steed and the thought is the rider. He passes like lightning through the fiery clouds; takes three and five and seven strides through the seven regions above, and the seven below he lifts his voice and calls the innumerable sparks, and joins them.

3. He is their guiding spirt and leader; when he commences work he separates the sparks of the lower kingdom that float and thrill with joy in their radiant dwellings, and forms therewith the germs of wheels. He paces them in the six directions of space, and one in the middle: the central wheel.

4. Fohat traces spiral lines to unite the sixth to the seventh, the crown; and army of the sons of light stands at each angle, and the Lipika in the middle wheel, they say: this is good, the first divine world is ready, the first is now the second. Then the divine Arupa reflects itself in Chhaya Loka, the first garment of the Andupadaka.

5. Fohat takes five strides and builds a winged wheel at each corner of the square, for the four holy ones and their armies.

6. The Lipika circumscribe the triangle, the first one, the cube, and the second one, and the pentacle within the egg. Iris the ring called "Pass Not" for those who ascend and descend. Also for those who during the kalpa are progressing towards the great day "Be with us." Thus were formed the Rupa and the Arupa: from one light, seven lights; from each of the seven, seven times seven lights: the wheels watch the ring.

Stanza VI

1. By the power of the mother of mercy and knowledge, Kwan-Yin, the "triple" of Kwan-Shai-Yin, residing in Kwan-Yin-Tien, Fohat, the breath of the progeny, the son of the sons, having called forth, from the lower abyss, the elusive form of Sien-Tchnag and the seven elements:

2. The swift and radiant one produces the seven Laya centres, against which none will prevail to the great day "Be with us," and seats the universe on these eternal foundations surrounding Tsien-Tchan with the elementary germs.

3. Of the seven: first one manifested, six concealed, two manifested, five concealed, three manifested, four concealed; four produced, three hidden, four and one Tsan revealed; two and one half concealed, six to be manifested, one laid aside. Lastly, seven smalls wheels revolving, one giving birth to the other.

4. He builds them in the likness of older wheels, placing them on imperishable centres. How does Fohat build them? He collects fiery dust. He makes balls of fire, runs through them and round them, infusing life therein, then sets them into motion; some one way, some the other way. They are cold, he makes them hot. They are dry, he makes them moist. They shine: he fans and cools them. Thus acts Fohat from one twilight to the other, during seven eternities.

5. At the fourth the sons are told to create their images. One third refuses, Two obey. The curse is pronounced: they will be born on the fourth, suffer and cause suffering: this is the first war.

6. The older wheels rotated downwards and upwards. The mother's spawn filled the whole. There were battles fought between the creators and the destroyers, and the battles fought for space; the seed appearing and re-appearing continuously.

7. Make they calculations, Lanoo, if thou wouldst learn the correct age of thy small wheel. Is fourth spoke our mother; reach the fourth fruit of the fourth path of knowledge that leads to Nirvanna, and thou shalt comprehend, for thou shalt see.

Stanza VII

1. Behold the beginning of sentient formless life. First the divine, the one from the mother-spirit; then the - spiral, the three from the one, the four from the one, and the five from which the three, the five, and the seven. These are the three-fold, the four-fold downward; the "mind born" sons of the first lord, the shining seven. It is they who are thou, me, him oh Lanoo. They who watch over thee, and thy mother earth.

2. The one ray multiplies the other rays; life precedes form, and life survives the last atom of form. Through the countless rays proceeds the life-ray, the one, like a thread through many jewels.

3. When the one becomes two, then the threefold appears and the three are one; and it is our thread, oh Lanoo, the heart of the man-plant called Saptasarma.

4. It is the root that never dies; the three-tongued flame of the four wicks. The wicks are the sparks, that draw from the three-tongued flame shot out by the seven: their flame, the beams and sparks of one moon reflected in the running waves of all the rivers of earth.

5. The spark hangs from the flame by the finest thread of Fohat. It journeys through the seven worlds of Maya.

It stops in the first and is a metal, and a stone; it passes into the second and behold: a plant; the plant whirls through seven changes and becomes a sacred animal. From the combined attributes of these, Manu, the thinker, is formed. Who forms him? The seven lives and the one life. Who completes him? The five-fold Lha. And who perfects the last body, Fish, sin and soma ...

6. From the first-born, the thread between the silent watcher and the shadow becomes more strong and

radiant with every change. The morning sunlight has changed into noonday glory.

7. This is they present wheel, said the flame to the spark, thou art myself, my image and my shadow. I have clothed myself in thee and thou art my Vahan to the day "be with us," when thou shalt re-become myself and others, thyself and me. Then the builders, having donned their first clothing, descend on radiant earth and reign over men who are themselves.

From The writings of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin

THE COUNSEL OF THE EXILE

Man has been set amidst the darkness of created things only to demonstrate by his individual light the existence of their Supreme Agent, to convince all who misconstrue it.

All things should speak, since the spirit and the voice of God should fill all, and yet is all mute about us.

It is a sign of the glory of our humanity, as it is an instance of the signal wisdom of Providence, that all such proofs adduced from the external order are thus deceptive in their last analysis ... The entire universe, notwithstanding all the splendours which it displays before our eyes, can never of itself manifest the truly divine treasures.

There is not a man in possession of his true self for whom the temporal universe is not a great allegory or fable which must give place to a grand morality.

At the first glance which man directs upon himself, he will perceive without difficulty that there must be a science or an evident law for his own nature, since there is one for all beings, though it is not universally in all, and since even in the midst of our weakness, our ignorance, and humiliation we are employed only in the search after truth and light. Albeit, therefore, the efforts which man makes daily to attain the end of his researches are so rarely successful, it must not be considered on this account that the end is imaginary, but only that man is deceived as to the road which leads thereto, and is hence in the greatest of privations, since he does not even know the way in which he should walk. The overwhelming misfortune of man is not that he is ignorant of the existence of truth, but that he misconstrues its nature. What errors and what sufferings would have been spared us if, far from seeking truth in the phenomena of material nature, we had resolved to descend into ourselves, and had sought to explain material things by man, and not man by material things; if, fortified by courage and patience, we had preserved in the calm of our imagination the discovery of the light which we desire all of us with so much ardour.

Man is the sole being in the natural order who is not compelled to pursue the same road invariably.

The function of man differs from that of other physical beings, for it is the reparation of the disorders in the universe. Man possesses innumerable vestiges of the faculties resident

in that Agent which produced him; he is the sign or visible expression of the Divinity.

The saintly race of man, engendered from the fount of wonder and the fount of desire and intelligence, was established in the region of temporal immensity like a brilliant star for the diffusion of heavenly light.

I must not conceal that this crass envelope is the actual penalty to which the crime of man has made him subject in the temporal region. Thereby begin and thereby are perpetuated the trials without which he cannot recover his former correspondence with the light.

When God has recourse to such visible signs as the universe to communicate his thought, it is to employ them in favour of beings separated from him. Had all beings remained in his unity, they would not have needed this means to draw towards him. The universe is therefore a sign of God's love for corrupted creatures separated voluntarily from the First Cause and submitted to the laws of justice in the womb of the visible universe. God operates unceasingly to remove the separation so contrary to their felicity.

The wisdom and bounty of the Divine Being are manifested by the birth of man into terrestrial life. He is thus placed in a position to soothe by his labour and striving a part of the evils which the first crime has caused

on the earth.

It is perhaps this wrong connection of ideas (that the earth is a mere point in the universe) which has led men to the still falser notion that they are not worthy of the Creator's regard. They have believed themselves to be obeying the dictates of humility when they have denied that the earth and all that the universe contains exists only on man's account, on the ground that the admission of such an idea would be only conceit. But they have not been afraid of the laziness and cowardice which are the inevitable results of this affected modesty. The present day avoidance of the belief that we are the highest in the universe is the reason that we have not the courage to work in order to justify that title, that the duties springing from it seem too laborious, and that we would rather abdicate our position and our rights than realise them in all their consequences. Where is the pilot that will guide us between these hidden reefs of conceit and false humility?

If there be anything deplorable in our existence, it is to know that we ourselves bar the approach of Divinity; it is to be physically aware that the Divinity is ever moving around us, striving to enter our hearts and thus raise us from the dead, to enliven us by the fire of the Spirit. The least ray of the Divine Word suffices to operate this prodigy within us, substituting virtues and characterised faculties in place of the tenebrous state which is peculiar to the region we inhabit. Yet it is the ray of this Word which we drive zealously away as though. it were death.

The learned describe nature; the wise explain it.

Had we the courage to make voluntarily the sincere and continual sacrifice of our entire being, the ordeals, oppositions and evils which we undergo during life would not be sent us; hence we should always be superior to our sacrifices, like the Repairer, instead of being almost invariably inferior to them.

Man's head is raised toward heaven, and for this reason he finds nowhere to repose it on earth.

All the impressions which are made on us by Nature are designed to exercise our soul during its term of penitence, to prompt us towards the eternal truths shown beneath a veil, and to lead us to recover what we have lost.

We are all in a widowed state, and our task is to remarry.

As a proof that we are regenerated we must regenerate everything around us.

From Inferno

AUGUST STRINDBERG

I

THE HAND OF THE UNSEEN

It was with feelings of savage glee that I returned homewards from the Gare du Nord where I had parted from my little wife. She was going to our child, who had fallen ill in a distant land. So now I had accomplished the sacrifice of my heart. Her last words, `When shall we meet again?' and my answer, `Soon,' still echoed in my ears as an untruth, a deception that I was unwilling to admit, even to myself, though something in me whispered that we had now parted for ever. Those farewell words that we exchanged in November 1894 were in fact our last, for up to the present time, May 1897, I have never seen my dear wife again.

When I got as far as the Cafe de la Regence I sat down at a table at which I had often sat with my wife, my beautiful wardress, who had spied upon my soul day and night, had guessed my secret thoughts, kept watch over the development of my ideas, observed with jealous resentment the striving of my spirit towards the unknown.

Restored to the world of the free, I became aware of a sudden expansion of my self that elevated me above the petty cares of life in the great city, that scene of intellectual strife, where I had just won a victory - no great

thing in itself, but to me of enormous significance, representing as it did the fulfilment of a youthful dream. A play of mine had been performed at a Paris theatre, the dream of all contemporary authors in my country, but one which I alone had realized. But now the theatre was repellent, as is everything that one has attained, and science attracted me: Compelled to choose between love and knowledge, I had made up my mind that I would try to reach the summits of intellectual achievement, but in my willingness to make a sacrifice of my love I forgot the innocent victim of my ambition or my vocation.

Back once more in my miserable student's room in the Latin Quarter, I delved into my trunk and drew forth from their hiding place six crucibles of fine porcelain which I had robbed myself to buy. A pair of tongs and a packet of pure sulphur completed the apparatus of my laboratory. All that remained to be done was to make a fire of furnace heat in the stove, secure the door, and draw down the blinds, for since the execution of Caserio, only three months earlier, it had become dangerous to handle chemical apparatus in Paris.

Night fell, the flames of hell rose from the burning sulphur, but towards morning I had ascertained the presence of carbon in sulphur, previously regarded as an elementary substance. By doing this I believed I had solved the great problem, overthrown the prevailing chemical theories, and won the only immortality accorded to mortals.

But from my hands, roasted by the intense heat, the skin was peeling off in scales, and the pain caused by the mere effort of undressing reminded me of what my victory had cost. Yet, alone in my bed, where the odour of woman still lingered, I was blissful. A feeling of spiritual purity, of masculine virginity, made me regard my past married life as something unclean, and I regretted that there was no one to whom I could render thanks for my deliverance from those degrading fetters, now broken without much fuss. The fact is, that in the course of years, as I came to notice that the unseen Powers left the world to its fate and showed no interest in it, I had become an atheist.

Someone to thank? There was no one, and the ingratitude thus forced upon me weighed me down.

Being jealously anxious about my discovery, I took no steps to make it known. My shyness prevented me from approaching authorities on the subject or the academies. All the same, I continued my experiments, but meanwhile my chapped hands became poisoned, the cracks widened, were filled with coke dust, blood oozed from them, and the agony became intolerable. Everything I touched caused me pain and I was in mind to ascribe my torment to those unknown Powers which, for so many years, had persecuted me and frustrated all my endeavours. Almost mad with pain, I avoided and neglected my fellow men, refused invitations, drove my friends from me. Silence and solitude encompassed me, the stillness of a desert, solemn, terrifying, in which I defiantly challenged the unseen Power to a wrestling match, body against body, soul against soul.

I had proved the presence of carbon in sulphur; I now had to show that it contained hydrogen and oxygen, for they also must be there. My apparatus was inadequate; I had no money, my hands were black and bleeding, black as was my need, bleeding as was my heart. For during all this time I had been carrying on a correspondence with my wife. I had told her of the success of my chemical experiments and she had replied with bulletins about our daughter, interspersed with warning hints about the futility of my scientific work and the imbecility of throwing away money on such things.

In an attack of righteous indignation, and overwhelmed by a furious desire to do myself an injury, I committed suicide by despatching an infamous, unpardonable letter, casting off wife and child for ever, and giving her to understand that I was 'involved in a new love affair.

My bullet hit the mark and my wife replied by demanding a divorce.

Solitary, guilty of suicide and assassination, my sorrow and anxiety made me forget my crime. No one came to see me, and I could seek out no one, as I had given offence to all. This gave me a feeling of exaltation, of drifting over the surface of a sea, with my anchor weighed but without a sail.

Meanwhile, necessity, in the form of my unpaid rent, made her appearance, interrupted my scientific work and metaphysical speculations, and brought me down to earth once more.

Such was my state as Christmas drew near. I had rather curtly refused an invitation to visit a Scandinavian family, as certain painful irregularities made the atmosphere of their house offensive to me. But in the evening, sitting alone, I regretted what I had done and went there all the same. No sooner were we seated at table than the midnight revels began, with a great deal of noise and unrestrained hilarity among the young artists, who were very much at home in that house. An intimacy that was repulsive to me, gestures and looks, in a word behaviour that was quite out of place in a family circle and caused me indescribable discomfort and depression. In the midst of these saturnalian revels my sadness conjured up before my inward eye my wife's peaceful dwelling. I had a sudden vision of the room, the Christmas tree, the mistletoe, my little daughter, her deserted mother. Pangs of remorse seized me, I stood up, alleged that I was feeling unwell, and departed.

I walked along the horrible Rue de la Gaiete, but the artificial merriment of the crowds there wounded me. Then I went along the silent, gloomy Rue Delambre, a street which, more than any other in that quarter, can make one feel desperate. I turned off into the Boulevard Montparnasse and sank on to a chair outside the Brasserie des Lilas.

For a few moments a glass of good absinthe gave me comfort, but then I was attacked by a party of cocottes and students who flicked me in the face with switches. As if pursued by the furies, I left my absinthe to its fate and hurried off to get myself another at the Cafe Francois Premier in the Boulevard Saint-Michel.

I had only jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire. Another lot of people came hallooing at me, `Hi, hermit,' and I fled back to my house, whipped by Eumenides and escorted and unnerved by the triumphant strains of their mocking song. The idea of a punishment, the consequence of a crime, never occurred to me. The part I was playing to myself was that of the innocent victim of unjust persecution. The unknown Powers were hindering me from carrying on my great work and it was essential to break through this hindrance if the crown of victory were to be won.

I had done wrong, and yet I was right and should be acknowledged right.

I slept ill that Christmas Eve. A cold blast swept over my face repeatedly and from time to time I was awakened by the strains of a Jew's harp.

A growing weakness of body and mind was gradually getting the better of me. My black and bleeding hands made it impossible for me to dress myself neatly. My anxiety on account of the rent I owed never gave me a moment's peace, and I paced up and down the room like a wild animal in a cage. I had given up eating regular meals and my landlord advised me to go to hospital; but this was no solution, as such places are expensive and demand payment in advance.

Then the veins in my arms began to swell, a sure sign of blood-poisoning. This was the final blow, and news of it spread to my fellow countrymen. One evening the kind woman from whose Christmas party I had so rudely and abruptly withdrawn - the very person for whom I had felt such antipathy, whom I had almost despised - sought me out, questioned me, learned of the deep distress in which I found myself, and, with tears in her eyes, tried to make me see that to go to hospital was my only hope.

Judge how forlorn and contrite I felt when my eloquent silence made it plain to her that I was without means. She was filled with compassion at seeing me reduced to such a state of misery. She herself was poor and oppressed by domestic cares and anxieties, but she announced that she would collect money for me among the members of the Scandinavian community and that she would go to see their chaplain.

The woman who had sinned had been merciful to the man who had just abandoned his truly wedded wife.

Once more reduced to beggary and appealing for charity through the agency of a woman, I began to suspect the existence of an unseen hand which was responsible for the irresistible logic of events. I bent before the storm, but was determined to rise again at the first possible moment.

A cab took me to the Hopital de Saint-Louis. On the way there I got out in the Rue de Rennes and bought two shirts, shrouds for my last hour!

The idea that my death was imminent obsessed me. I cannot explain why.

I was accepted as a patient and I was forbidden to go out unless I had obtained permission. My hands were swathed in bandages so that any sort of occupation was out of the question. I felt as if I were locked up in a prison.

My room was impersonal, bare, furnished only with absolute necessities, without a trace of beauty, and situated close to the patients' common-room, where people smoked and played cards from morning till night.

The bell sounded for lunch, and at the table I found myself among a company of spectres. Faces like death's-heads, faces of the dying. A nose missing here, an eye there a third with a dangling lip, another with a crumbling cheek Two of the individuals at the table did not look ill at all, but their expression was sullen and despairing. They were master thieves of a good family who, thanks to their powerful relatives, had been let out of prison on the grounds of illness. A nauseating smell of iodine took away my appetite; my bandaged hands obliged me to seek the assistance of my neighbours when I wanted to cut bread or pour myself out a drink. In the midst of this delightful company of criminals and those doomed to die there moved our kind mother, the matron, in her austere habit of black and white, dealing out to each of us his poisonous draught. I toasted a death's-head in a mug of arsenic; he toasted me in digitalis. It was lugubrious and yet one had to be grateful. Grateful, for anything so ordinary and at the same time so offensive!

People dressed and undressed me, tended me like a child. The nun took a special fancy to me, treated me like a baby and called me `my child', while I, like all the others, called her `mother'.

How wonderful it was to use that word `mother', a word that had not crossed my lips for thirty years. This elderly woman, who belonged to the Augustinian Order, wore the garb of the dead because she had never really lived her life. She was gentle as resignation itself, and she taught us to smile at our sufferings as if they had been so many joys, for she knew how salutary pain can be. She never uttered a word of reproach, she never admonished us, she never preached to us. She knew the rule she must obey, that applied in secularized hospitals, and she knew too how to grant small liberties to her patients, though never to herself. For this reason she used to allow me to smoke in my room, even offered to roll the cigarettes for me, an offer I declined. She got me permission to go out at other times than the usual hours and, when she discovered that I busied myself with chemistry, she arranged that I should be introduced to the learned pharmacist in charge of the hospital's dispensary. He lent me books and, after I had acquainted him with my theories on the nature of the elements, he invited me to work in his laboratory. That nun did indeed play a part in my life. I began to be reconciled to my fate and praised the fortunate misfortune that had brought me under that blessed roof.

The first book I borrowed from the pharmacist's library opened of itself and my eye lighted like a falcon on a line in the chapter on phosphorus. In a few words its author described how the chemist Lockyer had shown by spectral analysis that phosphorus was not an elementary substance, adding that an account of the experiment had been handed in to the Acad- emie des Sciences in Paris, which had not rejected his findings.

Feeling encouraged by this unexpected support for my theories, I set off into the city, taking with me my crucibles and what remained of the incompletely burnt sulphur. I handed these over to a firm of analytical chemists, who promised to give me, on the morning of the following day, a certificate of their analysis.

It was my birthday. When I got back to the hospital found awaiting me a letter from my wife in which she mourned my calamities and declared that she wanted to come to me in order to tend me and to love me.

The joy of knowing myself loved in spite of everything made me feel I wanted to express my gratitude, but to whom?

To the Unknown, who for so many years had hidden from me?

My heart melted; I confessed to the base lie about my infidelity, I begged for her forgiveness, and in a trice I

was involved in an exchange of love-letters with my own wife though I nevertheless postponed our reunion until a more suitable time.

The next morning I hurried off to my chemist in the Boulevard de Magenta. I carried back with me to the hospital the certificate in its sealed envelope. As I passed the statue of St Louis in the inner courtyard I recalled to mind the Saint's three achievements, the great Asylum for the Blind. L'Hospice des Quinze-Vingts, the Sorbonne, and the Sainte Chapelle, which I interpreted thus: from suffering, through knowledge, to penitence.

In my room, behind the closed door, I opened the envelope that was to decide my future, and I read as follows:

This powder, which has been handed in to us for investigation, has the following characteristics:

Colour: greyish black. Leaves a trace on paper.

Density: considerable, greater than the medium density of graphite; the substance appears to be hard graphite.

Chemical analysis:

This powder burns easily and in burning gives off carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide. That is to say, it contains carbon.

So pure sulphur contains carbon!

I was saved. From this moment I should be able to prove to my friends and relations that I was not mad. This would confirm the theories I had advanced in my work Antibarbarus, published a year before, which had been treated by the newspapers as the work of a charlatan or a madman, with the result that I had been cast off by my family as a good-for-nothing, a sort of Cagliostro.

Ha ha, thought I, now you are crushed, my worthy opponents! My whole- self swelled with righteous pride. I wanted to go into the city to cry aloud in the streets, roar in front of the Institut, tear down the Sorbonne, but my hands were still bandaged, and when I got out into the courtyard its tall railings counselled me to have patience.

The hospital's pharmacist, to whom I had communicated the results of the analysis, proposed that he should call together a committee before whom I might demonstrate my thesis by an experiment on the spot.

In the meantime, rather than do nothing, and aware too of my timidity when compelled to make a public appearance, I put together an article on the subject and sent it to Le Temps, where it was published within two days.

The password had been given. I had answers from various quarters, but no one denied the validity of my claims. I gained adherents. I was urged to send the article to a chemical periodical and became involved in a correspondence that stimulated .me to press on with the investigations I was pursuing.

One Sunday, the last that I spent in Saint-Louis, that place of purgatory, I was sitting at the window watching what was going on in the courtyard below. The two thieves were walking about with their wives and children, kissing them from time to time, and looking so happy as they warmed themselves at the flame of love that their misfortunes had only served to fan.

My own loneliness weighed heavily upon me, I cursed my fate. I thought it unjust because I had forgotten that my crime far exceeded theirs in baseness.

The postman arrived with a letter from my wife. It was cold and frigid. My success had wounded her and she pretended to base her scepticism on the opinion of a professional chemist. She added her advice on the perils of illusions that might lead to a mental breakdown. For that matter, what did I expect to gain by all this? Could I support a family by my chemistry?

The same alternatives again - love or knowledge. I did not hesitate, I struck her down with a final letter of farewell and felt as pleased with myself as a murderer who has dealt his blow successfully.

In the evening I took a walk in that gloomy part of the city I crossed the Canal St Martin, black as a grave, a most suitable place for drowning oneself in. I stopped at the corner of the Rue Alibert. Why Alibert? Who was he? Wasn't the graphite that the analytical chemist had found in my sample of sulphur called Alibert graphite? What did that imply? It was odd, but I could not rid my mind of the impression that there was something inexplicable about this. Next the Rue Dieu. Why God, when the Republic has abolished him and is devoting the Pantheon to a new purpose? Rue Beaurepaire. The delightful retreat of malefactors! Rue de Bondy. Was I being led by the devil? I gave up reading the names of the streets, got lost, retraced my steps, but still could not find my way, and finally recoiled before an enormous shed that stank of raw meat and mouldy vegetables, especially sauerkraut. Suspicious-looking persons brushed past me, shouting out coarse words as they did so. Fear of the unknown gripped me. I turned first to the right, then to the left, and stumbled into a sordid blind alley that seemed to be the abode of human trash, vice, and crime. Prostitutes barred my way, street arabs jeered at me. The scene from the night of the Christmas party was repeated, Vae soli! Who was it who was setting these ambushes for me the instant I detached myself from the world and from people? There was someone who had caused me to fall into this trap. Where was he to be found, that I might wrestle with him?

As I started to run, rain and slushy snow fell. In the background, at the end of a short street, I saw outlined against the sky a dark archway, an enormous, cyclopean structure. There was no place behind, only a sea of light. I asked a policeman where I was.

`At the Porte Saint-Martin, monsieur.'

A few steps more and I was out in the great boulevards and walking along them. It was a quarter past six by the theatre clock. Absinthe time, and my friends would be waiting as usual at the Cafe Napolitain. Quickening my pace, I pressed on, forgetting the hospital, my grief, and my poverty. But outside the Cafe du Cardinal I happened to bump against a table at which a gentleman was sitting. I knew him only by name, but he recognized me and in an instant his eyes had told me what he was thinking: `You here? So you are not in hospital after all! Fine humbug, that appeal for help!'

I was sure that this man must be one of my unknown benefactors, one of those who had given me alms, and I realized that to him I was a beggar who had no right to go to cafes. A beggar! Just the right word. It kept ringing in my ears, and drove a burning flush to my cheeks, a flush of shame, mortification, and rage.

To think that only six weeks before I had sat at this same table with the director of the theatre where my play was being performed. I had been his host and he had addressed me as `dear master'. Reporters had tumbled over one another to interview me; photographers had begged for the honour of selling my portrait. And now, a beggar, a branded man, an outcast from society.

Whipped, played out, hunted to death, I slunk along the boulevards like a night-bird and crept back to my hole among the pest-ridden. There I shut myself into my room. This was now my home.

When I reflect upon my fate I can see the hand of the Unseen at work, disciplining me, driving me on towards a goal that I myself was still unable to discern. He had granted me glory and at the same time He had denied me worldly honours. He had humbled me and simultaneously He had raised me up. He had made me grovel in the dust in order to exalt me.

The idea again occurred to me that Providence must have some mission which it intended me to carry out in this world, and that this was the beginning of my education for it.

I left the hospital in February, not cured of my illness, but proof against the temptations of the world. At our parting I had wanted to kiss the hand of our kind mother who, without preaching at me, had taught me the way to the Cross, but I had been held back by a feeling of veneration for something that must not be defiled.

May her spirit receive this tribute of gratitude from a stranger who had gone astray and who now dwells

concealed in a distant land!

2

SAINT LOUIS INTRODUCES ME TO THE CHEMIST ORFILA

I pursued my chemical investigations throughout the winter in a modestly furnished house I had rented. I stopped at home all day, but in the evening I went out to eat my dinner at a cremerie, where artists of various nationalities had formed a club. After my dinner I usually visited the family whose house I had once quitted in a fit of puritanism. Their home was a meeting place for the whole circle of artistanarchists, and I felt that I was doomed to endure there all the things I should have preferred not to see or hear: free and easy manners, loose morals, deliberate godlessness. There was much talent among them and infinite wit. Only one of them was a genius, a wild fellow, who has since made a great name for himself.

Nevertheless, it was a family circle. They loved me there and I was indebted to them, so I shut my eyes and closed my ears to their little private affairs, which were no concern of mine.

If it had really been unjustified pride that had made me shun these people my punishment would have been logical, but as my aloofness had arisen from my efforts to purify my individuality and refine my spirit by contemplation in solitude, I find it difficult to understand the workings of Providence in this matter. I am by nature flexible and very willing to adapt myself to my surroundings, out of pure affability and the fear of appearing ungrateful; so, as I was excluded from society by my pitiable and scandalous poverty, I was thankful to find some place of refuge in the long winter evenings, even though the very free tone of the conversation there cut me to the quick.

After it had been revealed to me that an unseen hand was guiding my steps along this rough path I no longer felt alone. I kept strict watch over my actions and my words, though in this I sometimes failed. But as soon as I sinned I was instantly caught, and the punishment administered was so punctual and so exactly suited to the crime that it left no room for doubts about the intervention of a power who chastised in order to reform.

I felt that I was personally acquainted with this unknown power, I talked to him, I thanked him, I asked his advice. Sometimes I imagined him to be my servant, the counter-part of Socrates' daimon, and consciousness that I could count on his assistance restored to me an energy and a feeling of confidence that spurred me on to exertions of which I had not thought myself capable.

Looked upon by society as a bankrupt, I was born again in another world where no one could follow me. Things that would previously have lacked significance now attracted my attention. The dreams I had at night assumed the guise of prophecies. I thought of myself as one of the dead, passing my life in another sphere.

I had already demonstrated the presence of carbon in sulphur. Analogy would suggest that hydrogen and oxygen were there too, but this I had still to prove. I spent two months making calculations and studying problems, but I lacked the apparatus for carrying out experiments. A friend advised me to go to the research laboratory at the Sorbonne to which even foreigners have access. But I was too timid and too frightened of crowds to dare to take such a step, so my work came to a standstill and a brief period of rest ensued. One beautiful spring morning I got up in a good mood, walked down the Rue de la Grande Chaumiere and reached the Rue de Fleurus, which leads to the Luxembourg Gardens. The lovely little street lay before me perfectly quiet, its wide avenue of chestnuts a brilliant green and straight as a racecourse, with David's column like a winning post at the far end. In the distance the dome of the Pantheon towered above everything else, while the golden cross that crowned it was almost lost in the clouds,

I stood still, entranced by this symbolic sight, but when I at last lowered my gaze I became aware of a dye-house sign on my right, in the Rue Fleurus. Ha! here I saw something undeniably real. Painted on the window of the shop were my own initials, A.S., poised on a silvery-white cloud and surmounted by a rainbow. Omen accipio. The words of Genesis came into my mind:

`I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.'

I no longer trod upon the ground, I floated through the air, and it was with winged footsteps that I entered the gardens, where there was not a soul about. At this early hour of the morning the place was mine. The rose-garden was mine. I recognized all my friends in the borders, the daisies, the verbenas, and the begonias.

After making my way along the course I reached the winning post and passed out through the iron gateway into the Rue Soufflot, turned towards the Boulevard Saint-Michel, and stopped beside the stall of second-hand books outside Blanchard's shop. Without thinking what I was doing, I picked up an old chemistry book by Orfila, opened it at random and read: `Sulphur has been included among the elements. Nevertheless, the ingenious experiments made by H. Davy and the younger Bertholet seem to prove that it contains hydrogen, oxygen and some special base which no one has so far succeeded in isolating.'

You may imagine the feeling of almost religious ecstasy that gripped me when confronted by this seemingly miraculous revelation. Davy and Bertholet had demonstrated the presence of oxygen and hydrogen, I of carbon. It had fallen to me therefore to provide the formula for sulphur.

A few weeks later I was enrolled as a student in the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the Sorbonne (St Louis's Sorbonne!) with the right to work in the research laboratory there.

The morning on which I betook myself to the Sorbonne was for me a holy day. Although I had no illusions about the possibility of convincing the professors there, who had received me with the chilly politeness accorded to foreigners who push themselves in, I yet experienced a calm joy, from which I derived the sort of courage a martyr must possess when he takes up the struggle against a multitude of enemies - because, of course, for me at my age, the young were my natural enemies.

When I arrived at the open space in front of the little church that is part of the Sorbonne I found the door open and went in, without really knowing why I did so. The Holy Mother and Child greeted me with a gentle smile. The figure on the cross, incomprehensible as always, left me cold.

My new acquaintance, St Louis, friend of all those smitten by poverty and disease, caused some young theological students to introduce themselves to me. Was it possible that St Louis was my patron saint, my good angel, and that he had driven me to the hospital, there to pass through the fire of agony before I could attain the glory that leads to dishonour and scorn? Was it he who had sent me to Blanchard's bookstall, who had drawn me here?

It was remarkable that, from being an atheist, I had sunk into a state of almost complete credulity.

The sight of the votive offerings, presented by candidates who had been successful in their examinations, made me swear a solemn oath that, supposing I should succeed, I would under no circumstances accept worldly recognition of my merits.

The hour had struck. I had to run the gauntlet between lines of merciless young people who, already informed of my chimerical task, were waiting to mock and insult me.

After about two weeks I had obtained incontrovertible evidence that sulphur is a ternary compound, composed of carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen.

I proffered my thanks to the Director of the laboratory, who pretended to take no interest in what I had been doing, and I left this new purgatory feeling at heart the most inexpressible delight.

Whenever I did not visit the Luxembourg Gardens I took my morning walk in the Cemetery of Montparnasse. A few days after I had concluded my investigation at the Sorbonne I happened to catch sight of a monument of classical loveliness near the circular open space in the cemetery. On a medallion of white marble I beheld the noble features of a wise old man. The inscription on the socle revealed to me who he was: Orfila, Chemist and Toxicologist. None other than my friend and protector, who has many times since then been my guide through the labyrinth of chemical operations.

A week later, as I was walking down the Rue d'Assas, I came to a halt in front of a house that looked like a monastery. A large signboard told me what manner of building it was: Hotel Orfila.

Again and yet again Orfila!

In the following chapters I shall relate all that occurred in this old house, to which the unseen hand drove me that I might be chastised, instructed, and - why not? - enlightened.

From The Occult Diaries

1901

January 3rd

Have been plagued for a couple of months by a smell of celery. Everything tastes and smells of celery. When I take off my shirt at night it smells of celery. What can it be? My (chastity), my celibacy?

January 5th

Finished The Bridal Crown and in doing so had a feeling that there would be a pause in my work as a dramatist.

Longing for Paris; planning a visit.

January 8th

Met (Bonnier) who dissuaded me from the Paris project. Read Echo de Paris sent by Courier de la Presse, and was frightened off. Had a message from (Bosse) saying that I must not go. Saw in the paper that 9 people had frozen to death in Paris. Decided not to go, for on the previous day I had (begged God) to signify (his will).

January 9th

Reading Balzac. `Lucien, in short, was loved absolutely, and in a way in which women very rarely love a man.' (Woman does not love; it is man who loves and woman who is loved.)

January 13th, Sunday

(B), who read Creditors and Simoon on the 12th, haunted me on the 12th. This haunting grew more intense on the 13th, and at night she persecuted me. (First telepathic `intercourse' with B.) When she appeared telepathically during the night I `possessed' her. Incubus.

The whole thing seemed to me quite ghastly and I (begged God to deliver me) from (this passion).

January 14th, Monday

Passed two ladies in the street; it was 6 degrees below zero and a fresh wind. A smell of celery (lasciviousness).

Passed two ladies again in the evening, and there was a smell of celery.

January 15th, Tuesday

What is all this leading to? I want to flee to Berlin, but I cannot.

Last year (Fru Ge~erstam) felt she was in telepathic communication with (Arvid Odman) or that he was hypnotizing her from a distance. She had, in fact, been in love with him in her youth.

January 25th

I saw a flag flying this morning from a house in Strandvagen. It made me happy. Coming closer I saw it was the `clean' Norwegian flag, at half-mast, with a wreath of laurel round a coat of arms, and something in the centre. What could it mean? But, of course! They were flying the English flag in honour of Queen Victoria who died recently!

(Aversion to B)

It is evening now, I am sitting alone at home while they perform The Saga of the Folkungs. The excitement of it all with me, though from time to time it relaxes, probably when the curtain falls.

Going over in my mind what my life has been I wonder whether all the horrible things I have experienced have been staged for me to enable me to become a dramatist, and depict all mental states and all possible situations.

From The Symbolism of the Tarot

P. D. OUSPENSKY

CARD I

THE MAGICIAN

I Saw the Man.

His figure reached from earth to heaven and was clad in a purple mantle. He stood deep in foliage and flowers and his head, on which was the head-band of an initiate, seemed to disappear mysteriously in infinity.

Before him on a cube-shaped altar were four symbols of magic - the sceptre, the cup, the sword and the pentacle.

His right hand pointed to heaven, his left to earth. Under his mantle he wore a white tunic girded with a serpent swallowing its tail.

His face was luminous and serene, and, when his eyes met mine, I felt that he saw the most intimate recesses of my soul. I saw myself reflected in him as in a mirror and in his eyes I seemed to look upon myself.

And I heard a voice saying:

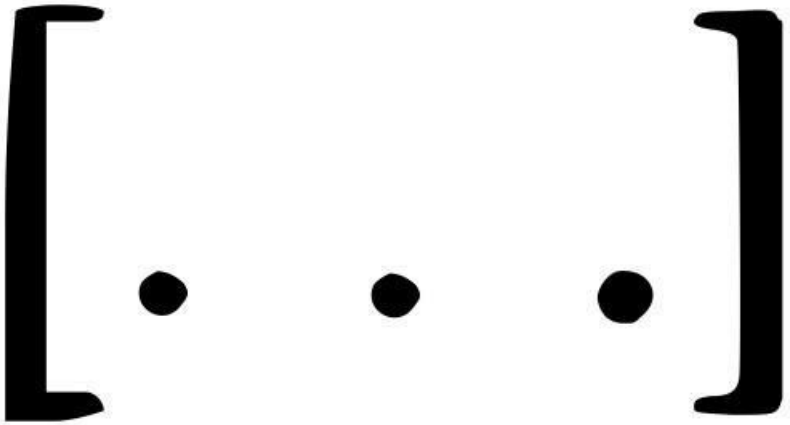
<Look, this is the Great Magician!

With his hands he unites heaven and earth, and the four elements that form the world are controlled by him.

The four symbols before him are the four letters of the name of God, the signs of the four elements, fire, water, air, earth.»

I trembled before the depth of the mysteries I touched ... The words I heard seemed to be uttered by the Great Magician himself, and it was as though he spoke in me.

I was in deep trepidation and at moments I felt there was nothing before me except the blue sky; but within me a window opened through which I could see unearthly things and hear unearthly words.



CARD XXI

THE WORLD

An unexpected vision appeared to me. A circle not unlike a wreath woven from rainbow and lightnings, whirled from heaven to earth with a stupendous velocity, blinding me by its brilliance. And amidst this light and fire I heard music and soft singing, thunderclaps and the roar of a tempest, the rumble of falling mountains and earthquakes.

The circle whirled with a terrifying noise, touching the sun and the earth, and, in the centre of it I saw the naked, dancing figure of a beautiful young woman, enveloped by a light, transparent scarf, in her hand she held a magic wand.

Presently the four apocalyptical beasts began to appear on the edges of the circle; one with the face of a lion, another with the face of a man, the third, of an eagle and the fourth, of a bull.

The vision disappeared as suddenly as it appeared. A weird silence fell on me. ((What does it mean?» I asked in wonder.

((It is the image of the world,)) the voice said, ((but it can be understood only after the Temple has been entered. This is a vision of the world in the circle of Time, amidst the four principles. But thou seest differently because thou seest the world outside thyself. Learn to see it in thyself and thou wilt understand the infinite essence, hidden in all illusory forms. Understand that the world which thou knowest is only one of the aspects of the infinite world, and things and phenomena are merely hierolgyphics of deeper ideas.))

CARD III

THE EMPRESS

I felt the breath of the spring, and accompanying the fragrance of violets and lilies-of-the-valley I heard the tender singing of elves. Rivulets murmured, the tree-tops rustled, the grasses whispered, innumerable birds sang in choruses and bees hummed; everywhere I felt the breathing of joyful, living Nature.

The sun shone tenderly and softly and a little white cloud hung over the woods.

In the midst of a green meadow where primroses bloomed, I saw the Empress seated on a throne covered with ivy and lilacs. A green wreath adorned her golden hair and, above her head, shone twelve stars. Behind her rose two snowy wings and in her hands she held a sceptre. All around, beneath the sweet smile of the Empress, flowers and buds opened their dewy, green leaves. Her whole dress was covered with them as though each newly opened flower were reflected in it or had engraved itself thereon and thus become part of her garment.

The sign of Venus, the goddess of love, was chiselled on her marble throne.

<Queen of life,* I said, <why is it so bright and joyful all about you? Do you not know of the grey, weary autumn, of the cold, white winter? Do you not know of death and graveyards with black graves, damp and cold? How can you smile so joyfully on the opening flowers, when everything is destined for death, even that which has not yet been born?»

For answer the Empress looked on me still smiling and, under the influence of that smile, I suddenly felt a flower of some clear understanding open in my heart.

CARD XX

JUDGMENT

I saw an ice plain, and on the horizon, a chain of snowy mountains. A cloud appeared and began to grow until it covered a quarter of the sky. Two fiery wings suddenly expanded in the cloud, and I knew that I beheld the messenger of the Empress.

He raised a trumpet and blew through it vibrant, powerful tones. The plain quivered in response to him and the mountains loudly rolled their echoes. One after another, graves opened in the plain and out of them came men and women, old and young, and children. They stretched out their arms toward the Messenger of the Empress and to catch the sounds of his trumpet.

And in its tones I felt the smile of the Empress and in the opening graves I saw the opening flowers whose fragrance seemed to be wafted by the outstretched arms.

Then I understood the mystery of birth in death.

CARD XVIII

THE MOON

A desolate plain stretched before me. A full moon looked down as if in contemplative hesitation. Under her wavering light the shadows lived their own peculiar life. On the horizon I saw blue hills, and over them wound a path which stretched between two grey towers far away into the distance. On either side the path a wolf and dog sat and howled at the moon. I remembered that dogs believe in thieves and ghosts. A large black crab crawled out of the rivulet into the sands. A heavy, cold dew was falling.

Dread fell upon me. I sensed the presence of a mysterious world, a world of hostile spirits, of corpses rising from graves, of wailing ghosts. In this pale moonlight I seemed to feel the presence of apparitions; someone watched me from behind the towers, - and I knew it was dangerous to look back.

CARD VI

THE LOVERS

I saw a blooming garden in a green valley, surrounded by soft blue hills.

In the garden I saw a Man and a Woman naked and beautiful. They loved each other and their Love was their service to the Great Conception, a prayer and a sacrifice; through It they communed with God, through It they received the highest revelations; in Its light the deepest truths came to them; the magic world opened

its gate; elves, undines, sylphs and gnomes came openly to them; the three kingdoms of nature, the mineral, plant and animal, and the four elements - fire, water, air and earth - served them.

Through their Love they saw the mystery of the world's equilibrium, and that they themselves were a symbol and expression of this balance. Two triangles united in them into a six-pointed star. Two magnets melted into an ellipsis. They were two. The third was the Unknown Future. The three made One.

I saw the woman looking out upon the world as though enraptured with its beauty. And from the tree on which ripened golden fruit I saw a serpent creep. It whispered in the woman's ear, and I saw her listening, smiling at first suspiciously, then with curiosity which merged into joy. Then I saw her speak to the man. I noticed that he seemed to admire only her and smiled with an expression of joy and sympathy at all she told him.

<(This picture you see, is a picture of temptation and fall», said the voice. <What constitutes the Fall? Do you understand its nature»?

((Life is so good», I said, ((and the world so beautiful, and this man and woman wanted to believe in the reality of the world and of themselves. They wanted to forget service and take from the world what it can give. So they made a distinction between themselves and the world. They said, We are here, the world is there». And the world separated from them and became hostile».

<Yes*, said the Voice, this is true. <The everlasting mistake with men is that they see the fall in love. But Love is not a fall, it is a soaring above an abyss. And the higher the flight, the more beautiful and alluring appears the earth. But that wisdom, which crawls on earth, advises belief in the earth and in the present. This is the Temptation. And the man and woman yielded to it. They dropped from the eternal realms and submitted to time and death. The balance was disturbed. The fairyland was closed upon them. The elves, undines, sylphs and gnomes became invisible. The Face of God ceased to reveal Itself to them, and all things appeared upside down.

<This Fall, this first <sin of man», repeats itself perpetually, because man continues to believe in his separateness and in the Present. And only by means of great suffering can he liberate himself from the control of time and return to Eternity - leave darkness and return to Light».

CARD XVII

THE STAR

A strange emotion siezed me. A fiery trembling ran in waves through all my body. My heart quickened its beating, tumult agitated my mind.

I felt that I was surrounded by portentous mysteries. And presently shafts of Light penetrated my being and illuminated many things before in darkness, whose existence even I had never suspected. Veils vanished of which I had been before unaware. Voices spoke to me. And suddenly all my former knowledge took a new and different meaning.

I discovered unexpected correlations in things which hitherto I had thought foreign to each other. Objects distant and different from one another appeared near and similar. The facts of the world arranged themselves before my eyes according to a new pattern.

In the sky there appeared an enormous star surrounded by seven smaller stars. Their rays intermingled, filling space with immeasurable radiance and splendour. Then I knew I saw that Heaven of which Plotinus speaks:

((Where ... all things are diaphanous; and nothing is dark and resisting, but everything is apparent to every one internally and throughout. For light everywhere meets with light, since everything contains all things in itself, and again sees all things in another. So that all things are everywhere, and all is all. Each thing likewise is everything. And the splendour there is infinite. For everything there is great, since even that which

is small is great.

<<The sun too, which is there, is all the stars; and again each star is the sun and all the stars. In each however, a different property predominates, but at the same time all things are visible in each. Motion likewise there is pure; for motion is not confouned by a mover different from it. Permanency also suffers no change of its nature, because it is not mingled with the unstable. And the beautiful there is beautiful, because it does not subsist in beauty. Each thing, too, is there established, not as in a foreign land, but the seat of each thing is that which each thing is.... Nor is the thing itself different from the place in which it subsists. For the subject of it is intellect, and it is itself intellect. . . . In this sensible region, therefore, one part is not produced by another, but each part is alone a part. But there each part always proceeds from the whole, and is at the same each time part and the whole. For it appears indeed as a part; but by him whose sight is acute, it will be seen as a whole.

((Where ... is likewise no weariness of the vision which is there, not any plenitude of perception which can bring intution to an end.

<<For neither was there any vacuity which when filled might cause the visible energy to cease; nor is this one thing, but that another, so as to occasion a part of one thing not to be amicable with that of another.

«Where ... the life is wisdom; a wisdom not obtained by a reasoning process, because the whole of it always was, and is not in any respect deficient, so as to be in want of investigation. But it is the first wisdom, and is not derived from another.

. . . . . .

I understood that all the radiance here is thought; and the changing colours are emotions. And each ray, if we look into it, turns into images, symbols, voices and moods. And I saw that there is nothing inanimate, but all is soul, all is life, all is emotion and imagination.

And beneath the radiant stars beside the blue river I saw a naked maiden, young and beautiful. She stooped on one knee and poured water from two vessels, one of gold and one of silver. A little bird in a near by bush lifted its wings and was poised ready to fly away.

For a moment I understood that I beheld the Soul of Nature.

<<This is Nature's Imagination,» said the voice gently. <<Nature dreams, improvises, creates worlds. Learn to unite your imagination with Her Imagination and nothing will ever be impossible for you. Lose the external world and seek it in yourself. Then you will find Light. <<But remember, unless you have lost the Earth, you will not find Heaven. It is impossible to see both wrongly and rightly at the same time.»

CARD VIII

POWER

In the midst of a green plain, surrounded by blue hills, I saw a woman with a lion. Girdled with wreaths of roses, a symbol of infinity over her head, the woman calmly and confidently covered the lion's mouth and the lion obediently licked her hand.

((This is a picture of power)), said the voice. ((It has different meanings. First it shows the power of love. Love alone can conquer wrath. Hatred feeds hatred. Remember what Zarathustra said: ((Let man be freed from vengeance; this is a bridge for me which leads to higher hope and a rainbow in heaven after long storms)).

((Then it shows power of unity. These wreaths of roses suggest a magic chain. Unity of desires, unity of aspirations creates such power that every wild, uncontrolled, unconscious force is subdued. Even two desires, if united, are able to conquer almost the whole world.

((The picture also shows the power of infinity, that sphere of mysteries. For a consciousness that perceives the symbol of infinity above it, knows no obstacles and cannot be withstood)).

CARD XV

THE DEVIL

Black, awful night enveloped the earth. An ominous, red flame burned in the distance. I was approaching a fantastic figure which outlined itself before me as I came nearer to it. High above the earth appeared the repulsive red face of the Devil, with large, hairy ears, pointed beard and curved goats' horns. A pentagram, pointing downwards, shone in phosphoric light between the horns on his forehead. Two large, grey, bat-like wings were spread behind him. He held up one arm, spreading out his bare, fat hand. In the palm I saw the sign of black magic. A burning torch held down-end in his other hand emitted black, stifling smoke. He sat on a large, black cube, gripping it with the claws of his beast-like, shaggy legs.

A man and woman were chained to the cube - the same Man and Woman I saw in the garden, but now they had horns and tails tipped with flame. And they were evidently dissatisfied in spirit, and were filled with protest and repulsion.

<This is a picture of weakness>>, said the voice, ((a picture of falsehood and evil. They are the same man and woman you saw in the garden, but their love ceasing to be a sacrifice, became an illusion. This man and woman forgot that their love is a link in the chain that unites them with eternity, that their love is a symbol of equilibrium and a road to Infinity.

«They forgot that It is a key to the gate of the magic world, the torch which lights the higher Path. They forgot that Love is real and immortal and they subjugated it to the unreal and temporary. And they each made love a tool for submitting the other to himself.

((Then love became dissension and fettered them with iron chains to the black cube of matter, on which sits deceit*.

And I heard the voice of the Devil: «I am Evil>, he said, <<at least so far as Evil can exist in this best of worlds. In order to see me, one must be able to see unfairly, incorrectly and narrowly. I close the triangle, the other two sides of which are Death and Time. In order to quit this triangle it is necessary to see that it does not exist.

((But how to do this is not for me to tell. For I am the Evil which men say is the cause of all evil and which they invented as an excuse for all the evil that they do.

«They call me the Prince of Falsehood, and truly I am the prince of lies, because I am the most monstrous production of human lies >.

CARD IX

THE HERMIT

After long wanderings over a sandy, waterless desert where only serpents lived, -I met the Hermit.

He was wrapped in a long cloak, a hood thrown over his head. He held a long staff in one hand and in the other a lighted lantern, though it was broad daylight and the sun was shining.

<<The lantern of Hermes Trismegistus)), said the voice, <<this is higher knowledge, that inner knowledge which illuminates in a new way even what appears to be already clearly known. This lantern <lights up the past, the present and the future for the Hermit, and opens the souls of people and the most intimate recesses of their hearts.))

((The cloak of Apollonius is the faculty of the wise man by which he isolates himself, even amidst a noisy crowd; it is his skill in hiding his mysteries, even while expressing them, his capacity for silence and his power to act in stillness.

<<The staff of the patriarchs is his inner authority, his power, his self-confidence.))

The lantern, the cloak and the staff are the three symbols of initiation. They are needed to guide souls past the temptation of illusory fires by the roadside, so that they may go straight to the higher goal. He who receives these three symbols or aspires to obtain them, ((strives to enrich himself with all he can acquire, not for himself, but, like God, to delight in the joy of giving)).

<<The giving virtue is the basis of an initiate's life.

((His soul is transformed into «a spoiler of all treasures* so said Zarathustra.

<dnitiation unites the human mind with the higher mind by a chain of analogies. This chain is the ladder leading to heaven, dreamed of by the patriarch)).

CARD XII

THE HANGED MAN

And then I saw a man in terrible suffering, hung by one leg, head downward, to a high tree. And I heard the voice:

((Look! This is a man who saw Truth. Suffering awaits the man on earth, who finds the way to eternity and to the understanding of the Endless.

#He is still a man, but he already knows much of what is inaccessible even to Gods. And the incommensurableness of the small and the great in his soul constitutes his pain and his golgotha.

<<In his own soul appears the gallows on which he hangs in suffering, feeling that he is indeed inverted.

<He chose this way himself.

<<For this he went over a long road from trial to trial, from initiation to initiation, through failures and falls.

«And now he has found Truth and knows himself.

<<He knows that it is he who stands before an altar with magic symbols, and reaches from earth to heaven; that he also walks on a dusty road under a scorching sun to a precipice where a crocodile awaits him; that he dwells with his mate in paradise under the shadow of a blessing genius; that he is chained to a black cube under the shadow of deceit; that he stands as a victor for a moment in an illusionary chariot drawn by sphinxes; and that with a lantern in bright sunshine, he seeks for Truth in a desert.

<Now he has found Her.

From Flights and Fantasies

EDGAR ALLAN POE

MESMERIC REVELATION

Whatever doubt may still envelop the rationale of mesmerism, its startling facts are now almost universally admitted. Of these latter, those who doubt, are your mere doubters by profession - an unprofitable and disreputable tribe. There can be no more absolute waste of time than the attempt to prove, at the present day, that man, by mere exercise of will, can so impress his fellow, as to cast him into an abnormal condition, in which the phenomena resemble very closely those of death, or at least resemble them more nearly than they do the phenomena of any other normal condition within our cognizance; that, while in this state, the person so impressed employs only with effort, and then feebly, the external organs of sense, yet perceives, with ,keenly refined perception, and through channels supposed unknown, matters beyond the scope of the physical organs; that, moreover, his intellectual faculties are wonderfully exalted and invigorated; that his sympathies with the person so impressing him are profound; and, finally, that his susceptibility to the impression increases with its frequency, while, in the same proportion, the peculiar phenomena elicited are more extended and more pronounced.

I say that these - which are the laws of mesmerism in its general features - it would be supererogation to demonstrate; nor shall I inflict upon my readers so needless a demonstration to-day. My purpose at present is a very different one indeed. I am impelled, even in the teeth of a world of prejudice, to detail, without comment, the very remarkable substance of a colloquy occurring between a sleep-waker and myself.

I had been long in the habit of mesmerizing the person in question (Mr. Vankirk), and the usual acute susceptibility and exaltation of the mesmeric perception had supervened. For many months he had been labouring under confirmed phthisis, the more distressing effects of which had been relieved by my manipulations; and on the night of Wednesday, the fifteenth instant, I was summoned to his bedside.

The invalid was suffering with acute pain in the region of the heart, and breathed with great difficulty, having all the ordinary symptoms of asthma. In spasms such as these he had usually found relief from the application of mustard to the nervous centres, but to-night this had been attempted in vain.

As I entered his room he greeted me with a cheerful smile, and although evidently in much bodily pain, appeared to be, mentally, quite at ease.

"I sent for you to-night," he said, "not so much to administer to my bodily ailment, as to satisfy me concerning certain psychal impressions which, of late, have occasioned me much anxiety and surprise. I need not tell you how sceptical I have hitherto been on the topic of the soul's immortality. I cannot deny that there has always existed, as if in that very soul which I have been denying, a vague half-sentiment of its own existence. But this halfsentiment at no time amounted to conviction. With it my reason had nothing to do. All attempts at logical inquiry resulted, indeed, in leaving me more sceptical than before. I had been advised to study Cousin. I studied him in his own works as well as in those of his European and American echoes. The `Charles Elwood' of Mr. Brownson, for example, was placed in my hands. I read it with profound attention. Throughout I found it logical, but the portions which were not merely logical were unhappily the initial arguments of the disbelieving hero of the book. In his summing up it seemed evident to me that the reasoner had not even succeeded in convincing himself. His end had plainly forgotten his beginning, like the government of Trinculo. In short, I was not long in perceiving that if man is to be intellectually convinced of his own immortality, he will never be so convinced by the mere abstractions which have been so long the fashion of the moralists of England, of France, and of Germany. Abstractions may amuse and exercise, but take no hold on the mind. Here upon earth, at least, philosophy, I am persuaded, will always in vain call upon us to look upon qualities as things. The will may assent - the soul - the intellect, never.

"I repeat, then, that I only half felt, and never intellectually believed. But latterly there has been a certain deepening of the feeling, until it has come so nearly to resemble the acquiescence of reason, that I find it difficult to distinguish between the two. I am enabled, too, plainly to trace this effect to the mesmeric influence. I cannot better explain my meaning than by the hypothesis that the mesmeric exaltation enables me to perceive a train of ratiocination which, in my abnormal existence, convinces, but which, in full accordance with the mesmeric phenomena, does not extend, except through its effect, into my normal condition: In sleep-waking, the reasoning and its conclusion - the cause and its effect - are present together. In my natural state, the cause vanishing, the effect only, and perhaps only partially, remains.

"These considerations have led me to think that some good results might ensue from a series of well-directed questions propounded to me while mesmerized. You have often observed the profound self-cognizance evinced by the sleepwaker - the extensive knowledge he displays upon all points relating to the mesmeric condition itself; and from this selfcognizance may be deduced hints for the proper conduct of a catechism."

I consented of course to make this experiment. A few passes threw Mr. Vankirk into the mesmeric sleep. His breathing became immediately more easy, and he seemed to suffer no physical uneasiness. The following conversation then ensued: - V. in the dialogue representing the patient, and P. myself.

P. Are you asleep?

V. Yes - no; I would rather sleep more soundly.

P. [After a few more passes.] Do you sleep now?

V. Yes.

P How do you think your present illness will result?

V. [After a long hesitation and speaking as if with effort.] I must die.

P Does the idea of death afflict you?

V. [Very quickly.] No - no!

P Are you pleased with the prospect?

V. If I were awake I should like to die, but now it is no matter. The mesmeric condition is so near death as to content me.

P I wish you would explain yourself, Mr. Vankirk.

V. I am willing to do so, but it requires more effort than I feel able to make. You do not question me properly.

P What then shall I ask?

V. You must begin at the beginning.

P. The beginning! But where is the beginning?

V. You know that the beginning is Gov. [This was said in a low, fluctuating tone, and with every sign of the most profound veneration.]

P. What, then, is God?

V. [Hesitating for many minutes.] I cannot tell.

P Is not God spirit?

V. While I was awake I knew what you meant by "spirit," but now it seems only a word - such, for instance, as truth, beauty - a quality, I mean.

P Is not God immaterial?

V. There is no immateriality; it is a mere word. That which is not matter, is not at all -unless qualities are things.

P Is God, then, material?

V. No. [This reply startled me very much.]

P What, then, is he?

V. [After a long pause, and mutteringly.] I see - but it is a thing difficult to tell. [Another long pause.] He is not spirit, for he exists. Nor is he matter, as you understand it. But there are gradations of matter of which man knows nothing; the grosser impelling the finer, the finer pervading the grosser. The atmosphere, for example, impels the electric principle, while the electric principle permeates the atmosphere. These gradations of matter increase in rarity or fineness, until we arrive at a matter unparticled-without particles - indivisible - one; and here the law of impulsion and permeation is modified. The ultimate or unparticled matter not only permeates all things, but impels all things; and thus is all things within itself. This matter is God. What men attempt to embody in the word "thought," is this matter in motion.

P The metaphysicians maintain that all action is reducible to motion and thinking, and that the latter is the origin of the former.

V. Yes; and I now see the confusion of idea. Motion is the action of mind, not of thinking. The unparticled matter, or God, in quiescence, is (as nearly as we can conceive it) what men call mind. And the power of

self-movement (equivalent in effect to human volition) is, in the unparticled matter, the result of its unity and omni-prevalence; how, I know not, and now clearly see that I shall never know. But the unparticled matter, set in motion by a law or quality existing within itself, is thinking.

P. Can you give me no more precise idea of what you term the unparticled matter?

V. The matters of which man is cognizant escape the senses in gradation. We have, for example, a metal, a piece of wood, a drop of water, the atmosphere, a gas, caloric, electricity, the luminiferous ether. Now, we call all these things matter, and embrace all matter in one general definition; but in spite of this, there can be no two ideas more essentially distinct than that which we attach to a metal, and that which we attach to the luminiferous ether. When we reach the latter, we feel an almost irresistible inclination to class it with spirit, or with nihility. The only consideration which restrains us is our conception of its atomic constitution; and here, even, we have to seek aid from our notion of an atom, as something possessing in infinite minuteness, solidity, palpability, weight. Destroy the idea of the atomic constitution and we should no longer be able to regard the ether as an entity, or, at least, as matter. For want of a better word we might term it spirit. Take, now, a'step beyond the luminiferous ether; conceive a matter as much more rare than the ether, as this ether is more rare than the metal, and we arrive at once (in spite of all the school dogmas) at a unique mass - an unparticled matter. For although we may admit infinite littleness in the atoms themselves, the infinitude of littleness in the spaces between them is an absurdity. There will be a point - there will be a degree of rarity at which, if the atoms are sufficiently numerous, the interspaces must vanish, and the mass absolutely coalesce. But the consideration of the atomic constitution being now taken away, the nature of the mass inevitably glides into what we conceive of spirit. It is clear, however, that it is as fully matter as before. The truth is, it is impossible to conceive spirit, since it is impossible to imagine what is not. When we flatter ourselves that we have formed its conception, we have merely deceived our understanding by the consideration of infinitely rarefied matter.

P. There seems to me an insurmountable objection to the idea of absolute coalescence; - and that in the very slight resistance experienced by the heavenly bodies in their revolutions through space - a resistance now ascertained, it is true, to exist in some degree, but which is, nevertheless, so slight as to have been quite overlooked by the sagacity even of Newton. We know that the resistance of bodies is, chiefly, in proportion to their density. Absolute coalescence is absolute density. Where there are no interspaces, there can be no yielding. An ether, absolutely dense, would put an infinitely more effectual stop to the progress of a star than would an ether of adamant or of iron.

V. Your objection is answered with an ease which is nearly in the ratio of its apparent unanswerability. - As regards the progress of the star, it can make no difference whether the star passes through the ether or the ether through it. There is no astronomical error more unaccountable than that which reconciles the known retardation of the comets with the idea of their passage through an ether; for, however rare this ether be supposed, it would put a stop to all sidereal revolution in a very far briefer period than has been admitted by those astronomers who have endeavoured to slur over a point which they found it impossible to comprehend. The retardation actually experienced is, on the other hand, about that which might be expected from the friction of the ether in the instantaneous passage through the orb. In the one case, the retarding force is momentary and complete within itself - in the other it is endlessly accumulative.

P. But in all this - in this identification of mere matter with God - is there nothing of irreverence? [I was forced to repeat this question before the sleep-waker fully comprehended my meaning.]

V. Can you say why matter should be less reverenced than mind? But you forget that the matter of which I speak is, in all respects, the very "mind" or "spirit" of the schools, so far as regards its high capacities, and is, moreover, the "matter" of these schools at the same time. God, with all the powers attributed to spirit, is but the perfection of matter.

P. You assert, then, that the unparticled matter, in motion, is thought.

V. In general, this motion is the universal thought of the universal mind. This thought creates. All created things are but the thoughts of God.

P You say, "in general."

V. Yes. The universal mind is God. For new individualities, matter is necessary.

P. But you now speak of "mind" and "matter" as do the metaphysicians.

V. Yes - to avoid confusion. When I say "mind," I mean the unparticled or ultimate matter; by "matter," I intend all else.

P. You were saying that "for new individualities matter is necessary."

V. Yes; for mind, existing unincorporate, is merely God. To create individual, thinking beings, it was necessary to incarnate portions of the divine mind. Thus man is individualized. Divested of corporate investiture, he were God. Now the particular motion of the incarnated portions of the unparticled matter is the thought of man; as the motion of the whole is that of God.

P. You say that divested of the body man will be God?

V. [After much hesitation.] I could not have said this; it is an absurdity.

P. [Referring to my notes.] You did say that "divested of corporate investiture man were God."

V. And this is true. Man thus divested would be God - would be unindividualized. But he can never be thus divested - at least never will be - else we must imagine an action of God returning upon itself- a purposeless and futile action. Man is a creature. Creatures are thoughts of God. It is the nature of thought to be irrevocable.

P. I do not comprehend. You say that man will never put off the body?

V. I say that he will never be bodiless.

P. Explain.

V. There are two bodies - the rudimental and the complete, corresponding with the two conditions of the worm and the butterfly. What we call "death," is but the painful metamorphosis. Our present incarnation is progressive, preparatory, temporary. Our future is perfected, ultimate, immortal. The ultimate life is the full design.

P. But of the worm's metamorphosis we are palpably cognizant.

V. We, certainly - but not the worm. The matter of which our rudimental body is composed, is within the ken of the organs of that body; or, more distinctly, our rudimental organs are adapted to the matter of which is formed the rudimental body; but not to that of which the ultimate is composed. The ultimate body thus escapes our rudimental senses, and we perceive only the shell which falls, in decaying, from the inner form; not that inner form itself, but this inner form, as well as the shell, is appreciable by those who have already acquired the ultimate life.

P. You have often said that the mesmeric state very nearly resembles death. How is this?

V. When I say that it resembles death, I mean that it resembles the ultimate life; for when I am entranced the senses of my rudimental life are in abeyance, and I perceive external things directly, without organs, through a medium which I shall employ in the ultimate, unorganized life.

P. Unorganized?

V. Yes; organs are contrivances by which the individual is brought into sensible relation with particular classes and forms of matter, to the exclusion of other classes and forms. The organs of man are adapted to his rudimental condition, and to that only; his ultimate condition, being unorganized, is of unlimited comprehension in all points but one - the nature of the volition of God - that is to say, the motion of the unparticled matter. You will have a distinct idea of the ultimate body by conceiving it to be entire brain. This it is not; but a conception of this nature will bring you near a comprehension of what it is. A luminous body

imparts vibration to the luminiferous ether. The vibrations generate similar ones within the retina; these again communicate similar ones to the optic nerve. The nerve conveys similar ones to the brain; the brain, also, similar ones to the unparticled matter which permeates it. The motion of this latter is thought, of which perception is the first undulation. This is the mode by which the mind of the rudimental life communicates with the external world; and this external world is, to the rudimental life, limited, through the idiosyncrasy of its organs. But in the ultimate, unorganized life, the external world reaches the whole body, (which is of a substance having affinity to brain, as I have said,) with no other intervention than that of an infinitely rarer ether than even the luminiferous; and to this ether - in unison with it - the whole body vibrates, setting in motion the unparticled matter which permeates it. It is to the absence of idiosyncratic organs, therefore, that we must attribute the nearly unlimited perception of the ultimate life. To rudimental beings, organs are the cages necessary to confine them until fledged.

P. You speak of rudimental "beings." Are there other rudimental thinking beings than man?

V. The multitudinous conglomeration of rare matter into nebulae, planets, suns, and other bodies which are neither nebula, suns, nor planets, is for the sole purpose of supplying pabulum for the idiosyncrasy of the organs of an infinity of rudimental beings. But for the necessity of the rudimental, prior to the ultimate life, there would have been no bodies such as these. Each of these is tenanted by a distinct variety of organic, rudimental, thinking creatures. In all, the organs vary with the features of the place tenanted. At death, or metamorphosis, these creatures, enjoying the ultimate life - immortality - and cognizant of all secrets but the one, act all things and pass every where by mere volition: - indwelling, not the stars, which to us seem the sole palpabilities, and for the accommodation of which we blindly deem space created - but that SPACE itself - that infinity of which the truly substantive vastness swallows up the star-shadows - blotting them out as non-entities from the perception of the angels.

P. You say that "but for the necessity of the rudimental life, there would have been no stars." But why this necessity?

V. In the inorganic life, as well as in the inorganic matter generally, there is nothing to impede the action of one simple unique law - the Divine Volition. With the view of producing impediment, the organic life and matter (complex, substantial, and law-encumbered) were contrived.

P. But again - why need this impediment have been produced?

V. The result of law inviolate is perfection - right - negative happiness. The result of law violate is imperfection, wrong, positive pain. Through the impediments afforded by the number, complexity, and substantiality of the laws of organic life and matter, the violation of law is rendered, to a certain extent, practicable. Thus pain, which in the inorganic life is impossible, is possible in the organic.

P. But to what good end is pain thus rendered possible?

V. All things are either good or bad by comparison. A sufficient analysis will show that pleasure, in all cases, is but the contrast of pain. Positive pleasure is a mere idea. To be happy at any one point we must have suffered at the same. Never to suffer would have been never to have been blessed. But it has been shown that, in the inorganic life, pain cannot be; thus the necessity for the organic. The pain of the primitive life of Earth, is the sole basis of the bliss of the ultimate life of Heaven.

P. Still, there is one of your expressions which I find it impossible to comprehend - "the truly substantive vastness of infinity."

V. This, probably, is because you have no sufficiently generic conception of the term "substance" itself. We must not regard it as a quality, but as a sentiment: - it is the perception, in thinking beings, of the adaptation of matter to their organization. There are many things on the Earth, which would be nihility to the inhabitants of Venus - many things visible and tangible in Venus, which we could not be brought to appreciate as existing at all. But to the inorganic beings - to the angels - the whole of the unparticled matter is substance; that is to say, the whole of what we term "space," is to them the truest substantiality; - the stars, meantime, through what we consider their materiality, escaping the angelic sense, just in proportion as the unparticled

matter, through what we consider its immateriality, eludes the organic.

As the sleep-waker pronounced these latter words, in a feeble tone, I observed on his countenance a singular expression, which somewhat alarmed me, and induced me to awake him at once. No sooner had I done this, than, with a bright smile irradiating all his features, he fell back upon his pillow and expired. I noticed that in less than a minute afterward his corpse had all the stern rigidity of stone. His brow was of the coldness of ice. Thus, ordinarily, should it have appeared, only after long pressure from Azrael's hand. Had the sleep-waker, indeed, during the latter portion of his discourse, been addressing me from out the region of the shadows?

From Magick in Theory and Practice

ALEISTER CROWLEY

HYMN TO PAN

ἔφριξ' ἔρωτι περιαρχής ὃ ανεπτὸμαν
ἰὼ ἰὼ πὰν πὰν
ὦ πὰν πὰν ἁλιπλαγκτε, κυλλανίας χιονοκτύποι
πετραίας ἀπὸ δειράδος φάνηθ', ὦ
θεῶν χοροπόι' ἄναξ

SOPH. AJ.

Thrill with lissome lust of the light,
O man! My man!
Come careering out of the night
Of Pan! Io Pan!
Io Pan! Io Pan! Come over the sea
From Sicily and from Arcady!
Roaming as Bacchus, with fauns and pards
And nymphs and satyrs for thy guards,
On a milk-white ass, come over the sea
To me, to me,
Come with Apollo in bridal dress
(Shepherdess and pythoness)
Come with Artemis, silken shod,
And wash thy white thigh, beautiful God,
In the moon of the woods, on the marble mount,
The dimpled dawn of the amber fount!
Dip the purple of passionate prayer
In the crimson shrine, the scarlet snare,
The soul that startles in eyes of blue
To watch thy wantonness weeping through
The tangled grove, the gnarléd bole
Of the living tree that is spirit and soul
And body and brain – come over the sea,

(Io Pan! Io Pan!)
Devil or god, to me, to me,
My man! my man!
Come with trumpets sounding shrill
Over the hill!
Come with drums low muttering
From the spring!
Come with flute and come with pipe!
Am I not ripe?
I, who wait and writhe and wrestle
With air that hath no boughs to nestle
My body, weary of empty clasp,
Strong as a lion and sharp as an asp –
Come, O come!
I am numb
With the lonely lust of devildom.
Thrust the sword through the galling fetter,
All-devourer, all-begetter;
Give me the sign of the Open Eye,
And the token erect of thorny thigh,
And the word of madness and mystery,
O Pan! Io Pan!
Io Pan! Io Pan Pan! Pan Pan! Pan,
I am a man:
Do as thou wilt, as a great god can,
O Pan! Io Pan!
Io Pan! Io Pan Pan! I am awake
In the grip of the snake.
The eagle slashes with beak and claw;
The gods withdraw:
The great beasts come, Io Pan! I am borne
To death on the horn
Of the Unicorn.
I am Pan! Io Pan! Io Pan Pan! Pan!
I am thy mate, I am thy man,
Goat of thy flock, I am gold, I am god,
Flesh to thy bone, flower to thy rod.
With hoofs of steel I race on the rocks
Through solstice stubborn to equinox.
And I rave; and I rape and I rip and I rend
Everlasting, world without end,
Mannikin, maiden, mænad, man,
In the might of Pan.
Io Pan! Io Pan Pan! Pan! Io Pan!

From Heaven and Hell

EMANUELSWEDENBORG

THERE IS A CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN EVERYTHING IN HEAVEN AND EVERYTHING IN MAN

The nature of correspondence is unknown nowadays; this for several reasons. The foremost reason is that man has moved himself away from heaven through love of self and love of the world. For a person who loves

himself and the world primarily focuses on worldly things only, since these appeal to his outward senses and gratify his inclinations. He does not focus on spiritual things because these appeal to the inner senses and gratify the mind. As a result, people of this kind reject spiritual things, calling them too lofty to think about.

The ancient people behaved differently. As far as they were concerned, a knowledge of correspondences was the finest of all knowledges. They drew discernment and wisdom through it; through it, church people were in touch with heaven. For this knowledge of correspondences is an angelic knowledge.

Using correspondence itself, the most ancient people (who were celestial people) thought like angels and actually talked with angels as a result. For the same reason, the Lord often appeared to them and taught them. Nowadays, though, this knowledge has so vanished that even the nature of correspondence is unknown.

Now, without insight into the nature of correspondence, nothing can be known in clear light about the spiritual world, nothing about its inflow into the natural world, or even about what the spiritual is relative to the natural; nothing can be known in clear light about man's spirit, called his soul, and how it acts on the body, nothing about man's state after death. Because of this, the nature and character of= correspondence needs to be presented. This will pave the way for further matters.

Let us then first state the nature of correspondence. The whole natural world corresponds to the spiritual world - not just the natural world in general, but actually in details. So anything in the natural world that occurs from the spiritual world is called a correspondent. It is vital to understand that the natural world emerges and endures from the spiritual world, just like an effect from the cause that produces it.

The natural world means all the expanse under the sun, receiving warmth and light from it. All the entities that are maintained from this source belong to that world. The spiritual world, in contrast, is heaven. All the things that are in the heavens belong to that world.

Since man is both a heaven and an earth in smallest form, on the model of the greatest, he has a spiritual world and a natural world within him. His spiritual world comprises his more inward elements, belonging to his mind and having to do with discernment and intention. His natural world comprises his more outward elements, belonging to his body and having to do with its senses and behaviour. So anything that occurs in his natural world (his body, its senses, and its actions) from his spiritual world (his mind, its discernment, and its intention) is called a correspondent.

The nature of correspondence is visible in man in his face. In a face which has not been trained to pretend, all the mind's affections stand out visibly, in a physical form as in their imprint. This is why the face is called the index of the mind, a person's spiritual world contained within his natural world.

In much the same way, the elements of discernment are represented in speech and the elements of intention in bodily attitudes. So these things that happen in the body - face, speech, or attitudes alike - are called correspondences.

This may also serve to clarify what the inner person is and what the outer person is. The inner is what is called the spiritual person; the outer, the natural. Further, the two are quite distinct, as are heaven and earth, in such a way that, further still, everything that happens or emerges in the outer or natural person happens and emerges from the inner or spiritual.

All this has to do with the correspondence of the inner or spiritual realm of man with his outer or natural realm. Now we must deal with the correspondence of the totality of heaven with the details of man.

It has been pointed out that the whole heaven reflects a single person, that it is a person in all appearance, and that it is therefore called the Greatest Man. It has also been pointed out that the angelic communities that constitute heaven are therefore arranged like the members, organs, and viscera in a person. So there are some which are in the head, some in the chest, some in the arms, and some in specific parts of them.

So communities that are in a particular member there correspond to the like member in man - those in the head, for example, correspond to the head in a person, those in the chest to the person's chest, those in the

arms to his arms, and so on. Man has being from this correspondence, for man has being only from heaven.

The division of heaven into two kingdoms, one called celestial and one called spiritual, has been pointed out above in the appropriate section. In general, the celestial kingdom corresponds to the heart and to everything dependent on the heart throughout the body. The spiritual kingdom corresponds to the lungs and to everything dependent on them throughout the body. Heart and lungs constitute two kingdoms in man, with the heart's domain extending through the arteries and veins, and the lungs' dominion through the nerve and motor tissues. Both are involved in whatever effort or activity occurs.

There are also two kingdoms in every individual's spiritual world, which is called his spiritual person. One of these belongs to his intention and the other to his discernment. Intention's dominion extends through affections for what is good, and discernment's through affections for what is true. These kingdoms correspond to the kingdoms of the heart and the lungs in the body.

The situation in the heavens is similar. The celestial kingdom is the seat of heaven's intention, where the "good" of love reigns. The spiritual kingdom is the seat of heaven's discernment, where what is true reigns. These are what correspond to the functions of the heart and lungs in man.

This correspondence is why "the heart" in the Word indicates intention, also the good of love; while "the breath" of the lungs indicates discernment and what is true of faith. This is also why affections are attributed to the heart, even though they are not in or from the heart.

The correspondence of heaven's two kingdoms with the heart and lungs is the general correspondence of heaven with man. Less general is the correspondence with his particular members, organs, and viscera, whose nature will now be noted.

In the Greatest Man, or heaven, people in the head are those who are involved in everything good more than others are. They are in fact involved in love, peace, innocence, wisdom, discernment, and in joy and happiness as a result. They flow into the head, and into things dependent on the head, in man; and they correspond to such things.

In the Greatest Man, or heaven, the people who are in the chest are involved in the good of charity and faith. They flow into man's chest, and correspond to it.

In the Greatest Man, or heaven, people in the loins or organs for generation are involved in marriage love. People in the feet are in the outmost good of heaven, which is called natural-spiritual good. People in the arms and hands are involved in the power of what is true from what is good. People in the eyes are involved in discernment; people in the ears, in hearkening and obedience; people in the nostrils, in perception; people in the mouth and tongue, in discussing on the basis of discernment and perception. People in the kidneys are involved in truth as examining, distinguishing, and correcting. People in the liver, pancreas, and spleen are involved in various kinds of cleansing of what is good and true. Other functions are performed elsewhere.

These flow into parallel elements in man, and correspond to them. The inflowing of heaven is into the functions and uses of the members of the body. The uses, being from the spiritual world, take form by means of such materials as occur in the natural world. So they present themselves in their effect, which is the source of correspondence.

This is why these same members, organs, and viscera are used in the Word to denote parallel things; for everything in the Word has meaning according to correspondence. "Head" is therefore used to denote discernment and wisdom, "chest," charity; "loins," marriage love; "arms" and "hands" the power of what is true; "feet," what is natural; "eyes," discernment; "nostrils," perception; "ears," obedience; "kidneys," examination of what is true; and so on.

This is also why it is natural for people talking about intelligence and wisdom to speak of "a good head," to speak of someone involved in charity as "a bosom friend," to refer to someone perceptive as "having a sharp nose," someone discerning as "sharp-sighted," someone powerful as "having a long arm," someone

who wills something from his love as "willing from his heart."

These expressions, and many others in people's language, stem from correspondence. They actually stem from the spiritual world, though people do not realize it.

The existence of this correspondence between everything heavenly and everything human has been demonstrated to me by an abundance of experience - such an abundance that I am so thoroughly convinced about these matters as to find them quite obvious, beyond any doubt. But listing all this experience is not our task at this point, and the very abundance precludes it. You may find it assembled in Arcana Coelestia in the treatment of correspondences, representations, the inflow of the spiritual world into the natural, and interaction between soul and body.

In spite of the fact that everything physical about man corresponds to everything heavenly, still a person is not a picture of heaven as far as his outward form is concerned, only as far as his inner form is concerned. It is the more inward elements of a person, after all, that receive heaven; his outer elements receive the world. So an individual is inwardly a heaven in least form, a reflection of the greatest heaven, so far as his more inward elements do receive heaven. To the degree that his more inward elements are unreceptive, he is not a heaven or a reflection of the greatest.

Be that as it may, his more outward elements, which receive the world, may be in a form that follows some pattern of this world - with different degrees of beauty, therefore. Outward or physical beauty, that is, goes back to parents and to formation in the womb. Thereafter it is maintained by means of a general inflow from the world. As a result, the form of an individual's natural person may differ radically from the form of his spiritual person.

A number of times, I have been shown what the form of an individual's spirit was like, and with some people who looked lovely and charming, the spirit looked misshapen, black, and monstrous - something you would call a reflection of hell rather than of heaven. With others who were not beautiful, the spirit looked graceful, radiant, and angelic. After death, a person's spirit looks the way it actually was within his body while it dwelt there in the world.

But correspondence includes even more than just man. There is an intercorrespondence of the heavens, the second or middle heaven corresponding to the third or inmost, and the first or outmost heaven corresponding to the second or middle. This first heaven corresponds to physical forms in man, called members, organs, and viscera.

So man's body is where heaven finally leaves off; it is what heaven stands on like a base. But this arcanum will be explained more fully elsewhere.

But the following fact must certainly be known: all the correspondence that exists with heaven is with the Lord's Divine Human, since heaven is from Him and He is heaven, as has been pointed out in the preceding chapters. For unless the Divine Human did flow into all the elements of heaven - and, following correspondences, into all the elements of earth - neither angel nor man would exist.

This clarifies again why the Lord became Man, why He covered His Divine with a Human from beginning to end. This happened because the Divine Human which has sustained heaven- before the Lord's coming was no longer adequate to keep everything going, since man, the "base" of the heavens, had undermined-and-destroyed the pattern.

Angels are baffled when they hear that there actually are people who ascribe everything to nature and nothing to the Divine, people who believe that their bodies, where so many heavenly marvels are assembled, are just put together out of natural elements -- who believe nature to be the source even of man's rationality.

Yet if only they could raise their minds a bit, they would see that things like this are from the Divine, not from nature, that nature was created simply to clothe the spiritual, to act as its correspondent and to give it presence in the lowest realm of the overall design. Angels compare people like this to owls, who see in the

dark but not in the light.

From Transcendental Magic

ELIPHAS LEVI

Behind the veil of all the hieratic and mystical allegories of ancient doctrines, behind the darkness and strange ordeals of all initiations, under the seal of all sacred writings, in the ruins of Nineveh or Thebes, on the crumbling stones of old temples and on the blackened visage of the Assyrian or Egyptian sphinx, in the monstrous or marvellous paintings which interpret to the faithful of India the inspired pages of the Vedas, in the cryptic emblems of our old books on alchemy, in the ceremonies practised at reception by all secret societies, there are found indications of a doctrine which is everywhere the same and everywhere carefully concealed. Occult philosophy seems to have been the nurse or god-mother of all intellectual forces, the key of all divine obscurities and the absolute queen of society in those ages when it was reserved exclusively for the education of priests and of kings. It reigned in Persia with the Magi, who perished in the end, as perish all masters of the world, because they abused their power; it endowed India with the most wonderful traditions and with an incredible wealth of poesy, grace and terror in its emblems; it civilised Greece to the music of the lyre of Orpheus; it concealed the principles of all sciences, all progress of the human mind, in the daring calculations of Pythagoras; fable abounded in its miracles, and history, attempting to estimate this unknown power, became confused with fable; it undermined or consolidated empires by its oracles, caused tyrants to tremble on their thrones and governed all minds, either by curiosity or by fear. For this science, said the crowd, there is nothing impossible; it commands the elements, knows the language of the stars and directs the planetary courses; when it speaks, the moon falls blood-red from heaven; the dead rise in their graves and mutter ominous words, as the night wind blows through their skulls. Mistress of love or of hate, occult science can dispense paradise or hell at its pleasure to human hearts; it disposes of all forms and confers beauty or ugliness; with the wand of Circe it changes men into brutes and animals alternatively into men; it disposes even of life and death, can confer wealth on its adepts by the transmutation of metals and immortality by its quintessence or elixir, compounded of gold and light.

Such was Magic from Zoraster to Manes, from Orpheus to Apollonius of Tyana ...

I testify that in fine there is one sole, universal and imperishable dogma, strong as supreme reason; simple, like all that is great, intelligible, like all that is universally and absolutely true; and this dogma is the parent of all others. There is also a science which confers on man powers apparently superhuman ...

To attain the SANCTUM REGNUM, in other words, the knowledge and power of the Magi, there are four indispensable conditions - an intelligence illuminated by study, an intrepidity which nothing can check, a will which cannot be broke, and a prudence which nothing can corrupt and nothing intoxicate. TO KNOW, TO DARE, TO WILL, TO KEEP SILENCE - such are the four words of Magus, inscribed upon the four symbolical forms of the sphinx. These maxims can be combined after four manners and explained four times by one another ...

There is no invisible world; there are, however, many degrees of perfection in organs. The body is the coarse and, as it were, the perishable cortex of the soul. The soul can perceive of itself, and independently of the mediation of the physical organs ... the things, both spiritual and corporeal, which are existent in the universe ... What is called the imagination within us is only the soul's inherent faculty of assimilating the images and reflections contained in the living light, being the Great Magnetic Agent ... The man of genius differs from the dreamer and the fool in this only, that his creations are analogous to truth, while those of the fool and the dreamer are lost reflections and betrayed images. Hence, for the wise man, to imagine is to see, as, for the magician, to speak is to create ... but the imagination of the adept is diaphanous, whilst that of the crowd is opaque ...

... the Astral Light, or terrestrial fluid, which we call the Great Magnetic Agent, is saturated with all kinds of images or reflections ... Such images are always present before us, and are effaced only by the more powerful impressions of reality during waking hours, or by preoccupation of the mind, which makes our

imagination inattentive to the fluidic panorama of the Astral Light. When we sleep, this spectacle presents itself spontaneously before us, and in this way dreams are produced ... Animal Magnetism is nothing but the artificial sleep produced by the voluntary or enforced union of two wills, one of which is awake while the other slumbers ... Thus, somnambulists do not actually travel to the place where they are sent by the magnetiser; they evoke its images in the Astral Light and can behold nothing which does not exist in that light ...

Magnetism between two persons is certainly a wonderful discovery, but the magnetising of a person by himself, awakening his own lucidity and directing it at himself at will, is the perfection of magical art.

Every intention which does not assert itself by deeds is a vain intention, and the speech which expresses it is idle speech. It is action which proves life and establishes will. Hence it is said in the sacred and symbolical books that men will be judged, not according to their thoughts and their ideas, but according to their works. We must do in order to be ...

Magical operations are the exercise of a natural power, but one superior to the ordinary forces of Nature. They are the result of a science and a practice which exalt human will beyond its normal limits ... But in order to work miracles we must be outside the normal conditions of humanity; we must be either abstracted by wisdom or exalted by madness, either superior to all passions or outside them through ecstasy or frenzy. Such is the first and most indispensable preparation of the operator .. .

Man can be modified by habit, which becomes, according to the proverb, his second nature. By means of persevering and graduated athletics, the powers and activity of the body can be developed to an astonishing extent. It is the same with the powers of the soul. Would you reign over yourselves and others? Learn how to will. How can one learn how to will? This is the first arcanum of magical initiation, and that it might be realised fundamentally the ancient custodians of sacerdotal art surrounded the approaches of the sanctuary with so many terrors and illusions. They recognised no will until it had produced its proofs, and they were right. Power is justified by attainment. Indolence and forgetfulness are the enemies of will, and for this reason all religions have multiplied their observances and made their worship minute and difficult. The more we deny ourselves for an idea, the greater is the strength we acquire within the scope of that idea ... What seek you therefore from the science of the Magi? Dare to formulate your desire, then set to work at once, and do not cease acting after the same manner and for the same end. That which you will shall come to pass, and for you and by you it has indeed already begun ... An idle man will never become a magician ...

Initiation is a preservative against the false lights of mysticism; it equips human reason with its relative value and proportional infallibility, connecting it with supreme reason by way of analogies. Hence the initiate knows no doubtful hopes, no absurd fears, because he has no irrational beliefs; he is acquainted with the extent of his power, and he can be bold without danger. For him, therefore, to dare is to be able. Here, then, is a new interpretation of his attributes: his lamp represents learning; the mantle which enwraps him, his discretion; while his staff is the emblem of his strength and boldness. He knows, he dares and is silent. He knows the secrets of the future, he dares in the present, and he is silent on the past. He knows the failings of the human heart; he dares to make use of them to achieve his work; and he is silent as to his purposes. He knows the significance of all symbolisms and of all religions; he dares to practise or abstain from them without hypocrisy and without impiety; and he is silent upon the one dogma of supreme initiation. He knows the existence and nature of the Great Magical Agent; he dares perform the acts and gives utterances to the words which make it subject to human will, and he is silent upon the mysteries of the Great Arcanum.

So you may find him often melancholy, but never dejected or despairing; often poor, never abject or miserable; persecuted often, never disheartened or conquered. He remembers the bereavement and murder of Orpheus, the exile and lonely death of Moses, the martyrdom of the prophets, the tortures of Apollonius, the Cross of the Saviour. He knows the desolation in which Agrippa died, whose memory is even now slandered; he knows what labours overcame the great Paracelsus, and all that Raymond Lull was condemned to undergo that he might finish by a violent death. He remembers Swedenborg simulating madness and even losing his reason in order to excuse his science; Saint-Martin and his hidden life; Cagliostro, who perished in the cells of the Inquisition; Cazotte, who ascended the scaffold. Inheritor of so

many victims, he does not dare the less, but he understands better the necessity for silence. Let us follow his example; let us learn diligently; when we know, let us have courage, and let us be silent.

From A Season in Hell

ARTHUR RIMBAUD

EXCERPTS

A Season in Hell

Formerly, if I remember rightly, my life was a banquet, at which all hearts opened and all wines flowed.

One evening I took Beauty upon my knees. - And I found her bitter. And I insulted her.

I have armed myself against justice.

I have fled. Oh enchantress! Oh misery! Oh hatred! - it is to you that my treasure has been entrusted.

I am succeeding in banishing all human hopes from my mind. In order to strangle all joys I have sprung upon them stealthily like a wild beast.

I have summoned the executioners, in order, while perishing, to gnaw the buttends of their guns. I have summoned scourges so as to stifle myself with sand and blood. Misfortune has been my god. I have stretched out in the mud. I have become dessicated in the air of crime. And I have played fine tricks with madness.

Spring has taught me the idiot's hideous laughter.

Now, finding myself, quite recently, on the point of croaking, I thought of seeking for the key of the ancient feast, so that I might, perhaps, recover my appetite.

Charity is that key. - This inspiration proves that I have been dreaming.

"Thou shalt remain a hyena, etc ..." exclaimed the demon who crowned me with such pleasing poppies. "Attain death with all your appetites, with your egoism and every capital sin."

Ali! I have endured too much: - But, dear Satan, a less irritated leer, I beg of you! - and awaiting one or two little belated villanies, I detach for you - you who love the absence of the descriptive or instructive faculties in a writer - these few hideous sheets from my notebook - the notebook of one of the damned.

A Night in Hell

I have swallowed a terrible draught of poison. - Thrice blessed be the advice which has been given me! - My vitals are burning. The violence of the venom twists my limbs, deforms, and strikes me down. I am dying of thirst. I am choking. Not a cry can I utter. This is hell, the eternal punishment, Behold how the fire flares up! I burn properly. So be it, demon!

I had glimpsed conversion to goodness and happiness - salvation. May I be able to describe the vision, for the atmosphere of hell will not suffer hymns! There were millions of charming creatures, a sweet spiritual concert, strength and peace, noble ambitions - what more do I know?

Noble ambitions!

And this is still life! If damnation is eternal! A man who wishes to mutiliate himself is indeed damned, is he not? I believe I am in hell, therefore I am. That is the fulfilment of the catechism. I am the slave of my baptism. Parents, you have created my own and your own misfortune. Poor innocent one! Hell cannot attack the

pagans. That is life once more! Later, the delights of damnation will be more profound. Quick - a crime, that I may fall into nothingness, in the name of the human law.

Silence! - wilt though be silent? Shame and reproach are here: Satan says that fire is ignoble, that my anger is hideously stupid. Enough! ... Errors, enchantments, false perfumes, puerile music are suggested to me. And to think that I possess truth, that I behold justice. I possess a sane and fixed judgment; I am ripe for perfection ... Pride - My scalp is drying up! Pity on me! Lord, I am full of fear. I am thirsty, so thirsty! Ali! Childhood, with the grass and the rain, the lake amidst the stones and the moonlight when the steeple struck twelve ... the devil is in the bell-tower at that hour. Mary! Holy Virgin! ... My dreadful stupidity.

Are they not honest souls over there who wish me well ... Come ... I have a pillow over my mouth and they hear me not: they are phantoms. Moreover, no one ever thinks of his neighbour. Let no one approach. Certainly I smell of burning.

Hallucinations are innumerable. This is indeed what I have always had: no more faith in history, and forgetfulness of principles. I will be silent on that score, for poets and visionaries would be jealous. I am a thousand times richer, so let me be as avaricious as the sea.

Ali! Come now - a short time ago the clock of life stopped. I am no longer in the world. - Theology is serious, hell is certainly down below - and heaven on high. Ecstasy, nightmare, slumber is a nest of flames.

When mentally alert in the country, what malice is displayed ... Ferdinand, Satan keeps pace with the wild seeds ... Jesus walks on the purplish brambles without bending them down ... Jesus walked on the troubled water. The lantern showed him to us, a white figure with brown tresses, upright by the side of an emerald wave ...

I am going to unveil all the mysteries: religious or natural mysteries, death and birth, the future and the past, cosmogony and nothingness. I am a master in phantasmagoria.

Listen!

I possess all talents! There is no one here and there is someone: I would not distribute my treasures. Do you wish for native songs, houri dances? Would you like me to disappear and dive in search of the ring? Is that your wish? I will produce gold and remedies.

Place your trust, then, in me, for faith relieves, guides and cures. Come, all of you - even little children - that I may console you and pour forth his heart - that marvellous heart - for your sake! Poor men and workers! I do not ask for prayers; with merely your confidence I shall be happy.

And let us think of myself. This makes me regret the world but little. I am lucky not to suffer more. My life was wholly made up of sweet acts of folly, and that was regrettable.

Bah! Let us make every imaginable grimace.

We are decidedly outside the world. There is not a single sound. My sense of feeling has disappeared. Ali! My chateaux, my Saxony, my willow-wood. The evenings, mornings, nights, days ... How tired I am!

I was bound to have my hell for anger, my hell for pride - and the hell consequent on caresses. A veritable concert of hells.

I am dying of weariness. The tomb awaits me. I am travelling to that horror of horrors - the worms. Satan, old blade, you wish to dissolve me with your charms. I demand, I demand! - a prod with your pitchfork and a drop of fire.

Ali! Once more to ascend to life! To look on our deformities. And this poison, this thousand-times-cursed kiss! My weakness and the world's cruelty! My God, pity! Hide me. I make too poor a resistance! I am hidden and yet I am not.

The fire is flaring up with its damned one.

As regards myself. The story of one of my follies.

For a long time I boasted of being in possession of every possible landscape, and found modern celebrities in painting and poetry derisive.

I was fond of idiotic paintings, frieze-panels, decorative pieces, mountebank canvases, sign-boards, popular coloured prints; old-fashioned literature, church Latin, ill-spelt erotic works, the novels of our grandmothers, fairy tales, little juvenile books, old operas, foolish refrains, and silly rhythms.

I dreamed of crusades, voyages of discovery of which there were no records, republics without a history, suppressed wars of religion, revolutions in morals, migrations of races and displacement of continents. I believed in all enchantments.

I invented the colour of the vowels! - A black, E white, I red, O blue, U green - I regulated the form and movement of each consonant, and, with instinctive rhythms, I prided myself on having fashioned a poetice diction accessible, one day or other, to all understandings. I reserved the translation.

It was, at first, a study. I wrote on the subject of silences and nights. I noted the inexpressible. I fixed the frenzies.

Far from birds and flocks and village girls, kneeling in the heather, surrounded by tender hazel-woods, amidst the warm green haze of the afternoon, what did I drink?

What could I drink - voiceless young elms, flowerless greensward, overcast sky! - in that young Oise? Drink from those yellow gourds, far from my hut, Darling? Some golden liquour which caused one to perspire.

I fashioned an incoherent tavern signboard. - A storm swept across the sky. At eve the waters of the woods lost themselves amidst virgin sands. The wind of God drove the icicles into the ponds.

Weeping, I beheld gold - and I could not drink.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

At four in the morn, in the summer,
The love-sleep still will last.
Under the groves the fragrance
Of the evenings feast fades away.

Down there, in the vast workyard,
Under the sun of the Hesperides,
The short-sleeved Carpenters
Already are hard at work.

Quietly, in their deserts of moss,
They will prepare the precious panelling
On which the city
Will depict false skies.

O! Venus! For those workers,
Charming subjects of Babylon's King,
Quit for a moment the lovers
Whose soul is crowned.

O Queen of Shepherds
Carry brandy to the workers,
That their strength, awaiting the mid-day
Sea-bath may be in peace.

* * * * *

The old lumber of poetics played a great part in my alchemy of the word.

To hallucination pure and simple I became habituated. In the place of a factory I saw a mosque; I saw a school for drummers made by angels, coaches on the roads of heaven, a drawing room at the bottom of a lake. The very title of a vaudeville raised up terrors before me.

Then I explained my magic sophisms by the hallucination of words.

I ended up by finding the disorder of my mind sacred. I became idle, a prey to heavy fever: I envied the blissfulness of the animals - the caterpillars, who represent the innocence of limbo, and the moles, the repose of virginity!

My character became embittered. In songs of sorts I said farewell to the world:

The Song of the Highest Tower

Let it come, let it come
The time one's enamoured of.

So long have I had patience
That never I forget.
Fears and sufferings
To the heavens have flown.
Unwholesome thirst
Obscures my veins.
Let it come, let it come
The time one's enamoured of.

I adored the desert, sunburnt orchards, tarnished shops, lukewarm drinks. I loafed in stinking lanes, and with closed eyes offered myself to the god of fire - the Sun.

"General, if an old cannon on thy ruined ramparts remains, bombard us with blocks of dry earth. The plate-glass windows of splendid shops! And the drawing rooms! Make the town eat dust. Oxidize the gargoyles. Fill the boudoirs with the power of burning rubies ..

Oh! gnat intoxicated in the village urinal, enamoured with borage, and whose destruction comes with a ray!

Hunger

If I have taste, it is for hardly anything else save earth and
stones.
On air, rocks, coal, iron – perpetually I lunch.
Hunger turn aside. Hunger depart to the meadow of sounds.
Attract the cheerful venom of bindweeds.
Eat shattered flints
Ancient stones of churches:
Shingle from ancient floods,
Bread strewn in valleys grey.

The wolf howled under the leaves
While spitting out the fine feathers
Of his meal of poultry.
Like him I burn away.

Salad and fruits
Await but the picking;
But the hedge-spider
Eats violets alone.

Let me sleep, let me boil
On the altars of Solomon.
The broth flows on the rust,
Mingles with the Cedron.

At last - 0 happiness, 0 reason - I dispelled the dark azure from the sky, and lived - a golden spark of light and nature. Joyfully, I assumed an expression as ludicrous and deluded as can be:

We have found it!
What? Eternity.
It is the sea
Mixed with the sun!

My eternal soul
Obscures your vow,
Despite the solitary night
And the fiery day.

Therefore you free yourself
From human suffrages,
Common impulses!
You fly according . . .

Hope no **more,**
No *orietur,*
Science and patience,
Punishment is sure.

Morrow no more,
Embers of satin,
Your ardour
Is the duty.
We have found it!
What? Eternity.
It is the sea
Mixed with the sun.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I developed into an incredible opera: I came to see that all beings feel an invincible necessity for happiness; that action is not life, but a way of making a mess of some force, an enervation. Morality is cerebral weakness.

It seemed to me that to every being several other lives were due. This man doesn't know what he is doing: he is an angel. That family is a litter of dogs. In the presence of several men I conversed aloud with a moment of their other lives. And thus I loved a pig.

None of the sophisms of insanity - the insanity which is put under restraint - have been forgotten by me. I can repeat them all. I possess the system.

My health was threatened. Terror set in. I fell into slumbers lasting several days, and continued the saddest dreams on rising. I was ripe for death, and along the road full of dangers, weakness led me to the boundaries of the world and the Cimmerian land of darkness and whirlwinds.

To divert the enchantments which had settled on my brain, travel was obligatory. And on the sea, which I loved as though it might cleanse me of defilement, the consolatory cross arose before my eyes. I had been damned by the rainbow. Happiness was my fatality, my remorse, my torment: my life would ever be too immense to be devoted to strength and beauty.

Happiness! Its tooth, sweet at the point of death, warned me by the crowing of the cock - ad matutinum, to

Christus venit - in the darkest cities:

O season, O chateaux!
Where is the soul without defect?
Of happiness, which no one evades,
I have made a magic study.
Hail to it every time there is
The crowing of the Gallic cock.
Ah! I shall no longer feel desire:
He has taken charge of my life.
This charm has captured soul and body
And killed all effort.
O seasons! O chateaux!
Alas! The hour of its flight
Will be the hour of death.
O seasons! O chateaux!

That is all over now. The power to greet beauty is now within my ken.

From Petit poemes en prose

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

THE TEMPTATIONS, OR EROS AND PLUTO AND GLORY

Two superb Satans and a She-Devil, not less extraordinary, mounted last night the mysterious staircase by which Hell assaults man's weakness when he sleeps, and communicates with him secretly. So they came and posed before me gloriously upright as if on a platform. A sulphurous splendour emanated from these three personages who detached themselves against the opaque darkness of the night. They looked so proud and so full of domination, that at first sight I took the three of them for real Gods.

The face of the first Satan was of an ambiguous sex; he had also, in the lines of his body, the softness of the

ancient Bacchus. His large languishing eyes, whose colour was tenebrous and uncertain, were like scented violets still wet with the rain of the storm, and his half-opened lips were like warm perfume boxes - from which exhaled strange odours; and whenever he sighed, musty insects took fire, as they flew from the ardours of his breath.

Around his purple tunic was corded, like a girdle, a caressing serpent who, with lifted head, turned languorously towards him his eyes that were like living embers. To this living girdle were suspended, alternating with phials with sinister liquours, shining knives and surgical instruments. In his right hand he held another phial which contained something luminously red, and which had for label these bizarre words: "Drink, this is my blood, a perfect cordial." In the left hand he held a violin which one supposes served him as an instrument on whose strings he could make vibrate his sorrows and his pleasures, and so spread abroad the contagion of his folly over midnight Sabbats. Around his delicate ankles trailed several rings of a broken chain of gold, and when the trouble which came from them made him lower his eyes, he gazed with intense vanity on the nails of his feet, brilliant and polished like precious stones. He gazed on me with his inconsolably broken-hearted eyes from which flowed an insidious intoxication, and he said to me in a singing voice: "If you desire, I can make you lord of souls, and you shall be the master of living matter, even more than the sculptor can be with his beings of clay: and you shall know the pleasure, forever reborn, of escaping yourself so as to forget yourself in others, and to attract other souls until they are conjoint with you."

And I answered him: "Many thanks, but I don't know what I would do with this precious pack of beings who, no doubt, are of no more value than my own little self. In spite of the fact that I have some shame in remembering myself, I don't want to forget anything. And even if I couldn't recognize you, old monster, your mysterious cutlery, equivocal phials, and the chains around your feet, are symbols which explain clearly enough the inconveniences of your friendship. Please keep your presents."

The second Satan had none of this tragic and smiling aspect, none of this fine insinuating manner, none of this delicate and precious beauty. He was large, with a fat, eyeless head, and his heavy stomach weighed down his thights. Every inch of his skin was gilded and illuminated, as if it were tattooed, with a crowd of moving figures representing the myriad forms of universal misery. There were little emaciated men who were writhing, suspended from a nail. Deformed gnomes with supplicating eyes asked for alms with outstretched hands. There were even little mothers, who wore round their waists the remnants of abortions. And these were not all.

The big Satan patted his enormous belly, and from it echoed a long, rattling click of metal, which ended with the sob of a chorus of human voices. He laughed, and displayed his broken teeth, and his laughter was like the complacent chuckle of well-off men who have dined too richly.

This Satan said to me: "I can give you that which obtains all, that which is worth all, that which replaces all." And he tapped again on his immense gullet, and a rumbling echo made up the commentary to his impudent words.

I turned from him in disgust, saying: "I have no need for my own enjoyment, or for anyone else's misery, and I certainly don't want the kind of riches that afflict one with all the horrors displayed, like tasteless wallpaper, on your corpulent flesh."

As for the She-Devil, I would be dishonest if I didn't admit that at first sight I found her a fetching creature, redolent of a bizarre charm. As for defining this appeal, I can't compare it with anything better than that of very beautiful women who are on the wane, those who never seem to age, yet whose beauty is like the enchanting magic of ruins. Her hair was imperious and disjointed, and her eyes, though tired, emanated a powerful fascination. What struck me most was the mystery of her voice, in which I found the sound of a delicious contralti combined with the husky rumble of one who has enjoyed too fully the pleasures of drinking brandy.

"Do you want to know my power?" said this Goddess with her charming and paradoxical voice. "Listen." She took a gigantic trumpet, decorated like a reed pipe with the names of all the newspapers in the world, and putting it to her lips, she blared out my name. It rolled across the universe like the roar of a thousand

waterfalls, and reverberated back to me after returning from the most distant planets.

"The Devil!" I cried, half in her power. "That's what's precious!" But, after examing more attentively the seductive virago, it seemed to me that I recognized her after all. Yes, that's it - I had seen her in a compromising situation with some knaves of my acquaintance, and the memory of that liason brought to mind the atmosphere of a shop worn prostitute.

So I answered resolutely "Get thee behind me. I'm not one to take as wife the mistress ofdullards I'd rather not remember."

I had every reason to be proud of my courage, integrity and fortitude. But soon after, I sadly awoke, and all my strength drained away. "In truth," I said to myself," I must have been dreaming to have shown such scruples. Now, if only they'd return when I am wide awake! Well, that would be a different story!"

I invoked them with ardour, begging their forgiveness, and assuring them that I would dishonour myself as often as possible, in order to warrant their return. But no luck. I hadn't the faintest doubt that I offended them, for they never returned.

From Lesfleurs du mal (The Flowers of Evil)

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

Correspondances

Nature is a temple where we live ironically
In the midst of forests filled with dire confusions;
Man, hearing confused words, passes symbolically
Under the eyes of the birds watching his illusions.

Like distant echoes in some tenebrous unity,
Perfumes and colours are mixed in strange profusions,
Vast as the night they mix inextricably
With seas unsounded and with the dawn's delusions.

And there are the perfect perfumes of the Flesh,
That are as green as the sins in the Serpent's mesh,
And others as corrupt as our own senses,
Having the strange expansion of things infinite,
Such as amber, musk, benzoin and sweet incenses,
That seize the spirit and the senses exquisite.

A Past Life

I have dwelt under the reign of Dynasties
Where the seas cast under the sunsets flames and fires,
I have seen the Nile yellowing its moods and mires,
And, under the Pyramids, Idolatries.

The surges, mirroring the images of the Skies,
Mixed in a fashion mystical with the choirs
Of the powerful accents of music richer than lyres
The sunset colours reflected in mine eyes.

It is there that I have lived in Sensuality,
In the midst of the waves and the splendours and the events
Of the naked slave girls, impregnated with strong scents,

Who refreshed with their waving fans my Luxury,
And whose only trouble was to investigate
The sorrowful secret of my languishing fate.

Litany to Satan

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

O grandest of the Angels, and most wise,
O fallen God, fate-driven from the skies,
Satan, at last take pity on our pain.

O first of exiles who endurest wrong,
Yet growest, in thy hatred, still more strong,
Satan, at last take pity on our pain!

O subterranean King, omniscient,
Healer of man's immortal discontent,
Satan, at last take pity on our pain.

To lepers and to outcasts thou dost show
That Passion is the Paradise below.
Satan, at last take pity on our pain.

Thou by thy mistress Death hast given to man
Hope, the imperishable courtesan.
Satan, at last take pity on our pain.

Thou givest to the Guilty their calm mien
Which damns the crowd around the guillotine
Satan, at last take pity on our pain.

Thou knowest the corners of the jealous Earth
Where God has hidden jewels of great worth.
Satan, at last take pity on our pain.

Thou dost discover by mysterious signs
Where sleep the buried people of the mines.
Satan, at last take pity on our pain.

Thou stretchest forth a saving hand to keep
Such men as roam upon the roofs in sleep.
Satan, at last take pity on our pain.

Thy power can make the halting Drunkard's feet
Avoid the peril of the surging street.
Satan, at last take pity on our pain.

Thou, to console our helplessness, didst plot
The cunning use of powder and of shot.
Satan, at last take pity on our pain.

Thy awful name is written as with pitch
On the unrelenting foreheads of the rich.
Satan, at last take pity on our pain.

In strange and hidden places thou dost move
Where women cry for torture in their love.
Satan, at last take pity on our pain.

Father of those whom God's tempestuous ire
Has flung from Paradise with sword and fire,
Satan, at last take pity on our pain.

Prayer

Satan, to thee be praise upon the Height
Where thou wast king of old, and in the night
Of Hell, where thou dost dream on silently.
Grant that one day beneath the Knowledge-tree
When it shoots forth to grace thy royal brow,
My soul may sit, that cries upon thee now.

From Cosmic Consciousness

R. M. BUCKE

I

What is Cosmic Consciousness? The present volume is an attempt to answer this question; but notwithstanding it seems well to make a short prefatory statement in as plain language as possible so as to open the door, as it were, for the more elaborate exposition to be attempted in the body of the work. Cosmic Consciousness, then, is a higher form of consciousness than that possessed by the ordinary man. This last is called Self Consciousness and is that faculty upon which rests all of our life (both subjective and objective) which is not common to us and the higher animals, except that small part of it which is derived from the few individuals who have had the higher consciousness above named. To make the matter clear it must be understood that there are three forms or grades of consciousness. (1) Simple Consciousness, which is possessed by say the upper half of the animal kingdom. By means of this faculty a dog or a horse is just as conscious of the things about him as a man is; he is also conscious of his own limbs and body and he knows that these are a part of himself. (2) Over and above this Simple Consciousness, which is possessed by man as by animals, man has another which is called Self Consciousness. By virtue of this faculty man is not only conscious of trees, rocks, waters, his own limbs and body, but he becomes conscious of himself as a distinct entity apart from all the rest of the universe. It is as good as certain that no animal can realize himself in that way. Further, by means of self consciousness, man (who knows as the animal knows) becomes capable of treating his own mental states as objects of consciousness. The animal is, as it were, immersed in his consciousness as a fish in the sea; he cannot, even in imagination, get outside of it for one moment so as to realize it. But man by virtue of self consciousness can step aside, as it were, from himself and think: "Yes, that thought that I had about that matter is true; I know it is true and I know that I know it is true." The writer has been asked: "How do you know that animals cannot think in the same manner?" The answer is simple and conclusive - it is: There is no evidence that any animal can so think, but if they could we should soon know it. Between two creatures living together, as dogs or horses and men, and each self conscious, it would be the simplest matter in the world to open up communication. Even as it is, diverse as is our psychology, we do, by watching his acts, enter into the dog's mind pretty freely - we see what is going on there - we know that the dog sees and hears, smells and tastes - we know that he has intelligence - adapts means to ends - that he reasons. If he was self conscious we must have learned it long

ago. We have not learned it and it is as good as certain that no dog, horse, elephant or ape ever was self conscious. Another thing: on man's self consciousness is built everything in and about us distinctively human. Language is the objective of which self consciousness is the subjective. Self consciousness and language (two in one, for they are two halves of the same thing) are the sine qua non of human social life, of manners, of institutions, of industries of all kinds, of all arts useful and fine. If any animal possessed self consciousness it seems certain that it would upon that master faculty build (as man has done) a superstructure of language; of reasoned out customs, industries, art. But no animal has done this, therefore we infer that no animal has self consciousness.

The possession of self consciousness and language (its other self) by man creates an enormous gap between him and the highest creature possessing simple consciousness merely.

Cosmic Consciousness is a third form which is as far above Self Consciousness as is that above Simple Consciousness. With this form, of course, both simple and self consciousness persist (as simple consciousness persists when self consciousness is acquired), but added to them is the new faculty so often named and to be named in this volume. The prime characteristic of cosmic consciousness is, as its name implies, a con sciousness of the cosmos, that is, of the life and order of the universe. What these words mean cannot be touched upon here; it is the business of this volume to throw some light upon them. There are many elements belonging to the cosmic sense besides the central fact just alluded to. Of these a few may be mentioned. Along with the consciousness of the cosmos there occurs an intellectual enlightenment or illumination which alone would place the individual on a new plane of existence - would make him almost a member of a new species. To this is added a state of moral exaltation, an indescribable feeling of elevation, elation, and joyousness, and a quickening of the moral sense, which is fully as striking and more important both to the individual and to the race than is the enhanced intellectual power. With these come, what may be called a sense of immortality, a consciousness of eternal life, not a conviction that he shall have this, but the consciousness that he has it already.

Only a personal experience of it, or a prolonged study of men who have passed into the new life, will enable us to realize what this actually is; but it has seemed to the present writer that to pass in review, even briefly and imperfectly, instances in which the condition in question has existed would be worth while. He expects his work to be useful in two ways: First, in broadening the general view of human life by comprehending in our mental vision this important phase of it, and by enabling us to realize, in some measure, the true status of certain men who, down to the present, are either exalted, by the average self conscious individual, to the rank of gods, or, adopting the other extreme, are adjudged insane. And in the second place he hopes to furnish aid to his fellow men in a far more practical and important sense. The view he takes is that our descendants will sooner or later reach, as a race, the condition of cosmic consciousness, just as, long ago, our ancestors passed from simple to self consciousness. He believes that this step in evolution is even now being made, since it is clear to him both that men with the faculty in question are becoming more and more common and also that as a race we are approaching nearer and nearer to that stage of the self conscious mind from which the transition to the cosmic conscious is effected. He realizes that, granted the necessary heredity, any individual not already beyond the age may enter cosmic consciousness. He knows that intelligent contact with cosmic conscious minds assists self conscious individuals in the ascent to the higher plane. He therefore hopes, by bringing about, or at least facilitating this contact, to aid men and women in making the almost infinitely important step in question.

From Hymns to the Night

NOVALIS

Before all the wondrous shows of the widespread space around him, what living, sentient thing loves not the alljoyous light, with its colours, its rays and undulations, its gentle omnipresence in the form of the wakening day? The giant-world of the unresting constellations inhales it as the innermost soul of life, and floats dancing in its blue flood: the sparkling, ever-tranquil stone, the thoughtful, imbibing plant, and the wild, burning multiform beast inhales it, but more than all, the lordly stranger with the sense-filled eyes, the

swaying walk, and the sweetly closed, melodious lips. Like a king over earthly nature, it rouses every force to countless transformations, binds and unbinds innumerable alliances, hangs its heavenly form around every earthly substance. Its presence alone reveals the marvellous splendour of the kingdoms of the world.

Aside I turn to the holy, unspeakable, mysterious night. Afar lies the world - sunk in a deep grave - waste and lonely is its place. In the chords of the bosom blows a deep sadness. I am ready to sink away in drops of dew, and mingle with the ashes. The distances of memory, the wishes of youth, the dreams of childhood, the brief joys and vain hopes of a whole long life, arise in gray garments, like an evening vapour after the sunset. In other regions the light has pitched its joyous tents. What if it should never return to its children, who wait for it with the faith of innocence?

What springs up all at once so sweetly boding in my heart, and stills the soft air of sadness? Dost thou also take a pleasure in us, dark night? What holdest thou under thy mantle, that with hidden power affects my soul? Precious balm drips from thy hand out of its bundle of poppies. Thou upliftest the heavy-laden wings of the soul. Darkly and inexpressibly are we moved: joy-startled, I see a grave face that, tender and worshipful, inclines toward me, and, amid manifold entangled locks, reveals the youthful loveliness of the mother. How poor and childish a thing seems to me now the light, how joyous and welcome the departure of the day, because the night turns away from thee thy servants, you now strew in the gulfs of space those flashing globes, to proclaim thy omnipotence, thy return, in seasons of thy absence. More heavenly than those glittering stars we hold the eternal eyes which the night hath opened within us. Farther they see than the palest of those countless hosts - needing no aid from the light, they penetrate the depths of a loving soul - that fills a loftier region with bliss ineffable. Glory to the queen of the world, to the great prophet of the holier worlds, to the guardian of blissful love, she sends thee to me, thou tenderly beloved, the gracious sun of the night, now am I awake for now am I thine and mine, thou hast made me know the night, made of me a man, consume with spirit-fire my body, that I, turned to finer air, may mingle more closely with thee, and then our bridal night endure forever.

2

Must the morning always return? Will the despotism of the earthly never cease? Unholy activity consumes the angel-visit of the night. Will the time never come when love's hidden sacrifice shall burn eternally? To the light a season was set; but everlasting and boundless is the dominion of the night. Endless is the duration of sleep. Holy sleep, gladden not too seldom in this earthly day-labour, the devoted servant of the night. Fools alone mistake thee, knowing nought of sleep but the shadow which, in the twilight of the real night, thou pitifully cast over us. They feel thee not in the golden flood of the grapes - in the magic oil of the almond tree - and the brown juice of the poppy. They know not that it is thou who haunt the bosom of the tender maiden, and make a heaven of her lap; never suspect it is thou, opening the doors to Heaven, that step to meet them out of ancient stories, bearing the key to the dwellings of the blessed, silent messenger of secrets infinite.

3

Once when I was shedding bitter tears, when, dissolved in pain, my hope was melting away, and I stood alone by the barren mound which in its narrow dark bosom hid the vanished form of my life - lonely as never yet was lonely man, driven by anxiety unspeakable - powerless, and no longer anything but a conscious misery. As there I looked about me for help, unable to go on or to turn back, and clung to the fleeting, extinguished life with an endless longing: then, out of the blue distances, from the hills of my ancient bliss, came a shiver of twilight, and at once snapped the bond of birth, the chains of the light. Away fled the glory of the world, and with it my mourning - the sadness flowed together into a new, unfathomable world. Thou, night-inspiration, heavenly Slumber, didst come upon me, the region gently heaved up itself, over it hovered my unbound, newborn spirit. The mound became a cloud of dust and through the cloud I saw the glorified face of my beloved. In her eyes eternity. reposed. I laid hold of her hands, and the tears became a sparkling

bond that could not be broken. Into the distance swept by, like a tempest, thousands of years. On her neck I welcomed the new life with ecstatic tears. It was the first, the only dream and just since then I have held fast an eternal, unchangeable faith in the heaven of the night, and its light, the beloved.

4

Now I know when will come the last morning: when the light no more scares away night and love: when sleep shall be without waking, and but one continuous dream. I feel in me a celestial exhaustion. Long and weariful was my pilgrimage to the holy grave, and crushing was the cross. The crystal wave, which, imperceptible to the ordinary sense, springs in the dark bosom of the mound against whose foot breaks the flood of the world, he who has tasted it, he who has stood on the mountain frontier of the world, and looked across into the new land, into the abode of the night: truly he turns not again into the tumult of the world, into the land where dwells the light in ceaseless unrest.

On those heights he builds for himself tabernacles, tabernacles of peace, and there longs and loves and gazes across, until the most welcome of all hours draws him down into the waters of the spring. Afloat above remains what is earthly, and is swept back in storms, but what became holy by the touch of love, runs free through hidden ways to the region beyond, where, like fragrances, it mingles with love asleep.

Still you wake, cheerful light, that weary man to his labour - and into me you pour joyous life - but thou wilest me not away from Memory's moss-grown monument. Gladly will I stir busy hands, everywhere behold where thou hast need of me, praise the lustre of thy splendour, pursue unwearied the lovely harmonies of thy skilled handicraft: gladly contemplate the clever pace of thy mighty, luminous clock, explore the balance of the forces and the laws of the wondrous play of countless worlds and their seasons. But true to the night remains my secret heart, and to creative love, her daughter. Canst thou show me a heart eternally true? has thy sun friendly eyes that know me? do thy stars lay hold of my longing hand? and return me the tender pressure and the caressing word? was it thou did adorn them with colours and a flickering outline, or was it she who gave to thy jewels a higher, a dearer weight? What delight, what pleasure offers thy life, to outweigh the transports of death? Wears not everything that inspires us the colour of the Night? She sustains thee mother-like, and to her you owe all *thy glory. Thou wouldst vanish into thyself, in boundless space thou wouldst dissolve, if she did not hold thee fast, if she swaddled thee not, so that thou grew warm, and flaming, begot the universe. Truly I was, before you were - the mother sent me with my brothers and sisters to inhabit thy world, to hallow it with love that it might be an ever-present memorial - to plant it with flowers unfading. As yet they have not ripened, these thoughts divine, as yet is there small trace of our coming revelation. One day thy clock will point to the end of time, and then thou shall be as one of us, and shall, full of ardent longing, be extinguished and die. I feel in me the close of thy activity, heavenly freedom, and blessed return. With wild pangs I recognize thy distance from our home, thy resistance against the ancient, glorious heaven. Thy rage and thy raving are in vain. Unscorchable stands the cross: victory-banner of our breed.

Over I journey
And for each pain
A pleasant sting only
Shall one day remain.
Yet in a few moments
Then free am I,
And intoxicated
In love's lap lie.
Life everlasting
Lifts, wave-like, at me,
I gaze from its summit
Down after thee.
Your lustre must vanish
Yon mound underneath –
A shadow will bring thee
Thy cooling wreath.
Oh draw at my heart, love,
Draw till I'm gone,
That, fallen asleep, I
Still may love on.
I feel the flow of
Death's youth-giving flood
To balsam and ether
Transform my blood –
I live all the daytime
In faith and in might
And in holy fire
I die every night.

5

In ancient times, over the widespread families of men an iron fate ruled with dumb force. A gloomy oppression swathed their heavy souls - the earth was boundless - the abode of the gods and their home. From eternal ages stood its mysterious structure. Beyond the red hills of the morning, in the sacred bosom of the sea, dwelt the sun, the all-enkindling, living light. An aged giant held up the blissful world. Fast beneath mountains lay the first-born sons of mother earth. Helpless in their destroying fury against the new, glorious race of gods, and their kindred, glad-hearted men. The ocean's dark green abyss was the lap of a goddess. In crystal grottos revelled a luxuriant folk. Rivers, trees, flowers, and beasts had human wits. Sweeter tasted the wine poured out by youthabundance, a god in the grape-clusters, a loving, motherly goddess grew in the full golden sheaves, love's sacred inebriation was a sweet worship of the fairest of the god-ladies. Life rustled through the centuries like one spring-time, an evervariegated festival of heaven-children and earth-dwellers. All races childlike adored the ethereal, thousand-fold flame as the one sublime thing in the world. There was but one notion, a horrible dream-shape:

That fearsome to the merry tables strode,
A wrapped the spirit there in wild fright.
The gods themselves no counsel knew nor showed
To fill the anxious hearts with comfort light.
Mysterious was the monster's pathless road,
Whose rage no prayer nor tribute could requite;
'Twas death who broke the banquet up with fears,
With anguish, dire pain, and bitter tears.

Eternally from all things here disparted
That sway the heart with pleasure's joyous flow,
Divided from the loved ones who've departed,
Tossed by longing vain, unceasing woe –
In a dull dream to struggle, faint and thwarted,
Seemed all was granted to the dead below.

Broke lay the merry wave of human bliss
On death's inevitable, rocky cliff.

With daring spirit and a passion deep,
Did man ameliorate the horrid blight,
A gentle youth puts out his torch, to sleep –
The end, just like a harp's sigh, comes light.
Cool shadow floods o'er melting memory creep,
So sang the song, into its sorry need.
Still undeciphered lay the endless night –
The solemn symbol of a far-off might.

The old world began to decline. The pleasure-garden of the young race withered away, up into more open, desolate regions, forsaking his childhood, struggled the growing man. The gods vanished with their retinue. Nature stood alone and lifeless. Dry number and rigid measure bound it with iron chains. Into dust and air the priceless blossoms of life fell away in words obscure. Gone was wonder-working faith, and its alltransforming, all-uniting angel-comrade, the imagination. A cold north wind blew unkindly over the rigid plain, and the rigid wonderland first froze, then evaporated into ether. The far depths of heaven filled with glowing worlds. Into the deeper sanctuary, into the more exalted region of feeling, the soul of the world retired with all its earthly powers, there to rule until the dawn should break of universal glory. No longer was the light the abode of the gods, and the heavenly token of their presence: they drew over themselves the veil of the night. The night became the mighty womb of revelations, into it the gods went back and fell asleep, to go abroad in new and more glorious shapes over the transfigured world. Among the people who too early were become of all the most scornful and insolently estranged from the blessed innocence of youth, appeared the new world with a face never seen before- in the poverty of a poetic shelter - a son of the first

virgin and mother - the eternal fruit of mysterious embrace. The foreboding, rich-blossoming wisdom of the east at once recognized the beginning of the new age. A star showed the way to the humble cradle of the king. In the name of the distant future, they did him homage with lustre and fragrance, the highest wonders of nature. In solitude the heavenly heart unfolded to a flower-chalice of almighty love upturned toward the supreme face of the father, and resting on the blissforeboding bosom of the sweetly solemn mother. With deifying fervour the prophetic eye of the blooming child beheld the years to come, foresaw, untroubled over the earthly lot of his own days, the beloved offspring of his divine stem. Ere long the most childlike souls, by true love marvellously possessed, gathered about him. Like flowers sprang up a strange new life in his presence. Words inexhaustible and the most joyful tidings fell like sparks of a divine spirit from his friendly lips. From a far shore, born under the clear sky of Hellas, came a singer to Palestine, and gave up his whole heart to the wonder-child:

The youth thou art who ages long hast stood
Upon our graves, so deeply lost in thought;
A sign of comfort in the dusky gloom
For high humanity, a joyful start.
What dropped us all into abyssmal woe,
Pulls us forward with sweet yearning now.
In everlasting life death found its goal,
for thou art death who at last makes us whole.

Filled with joy, the singer went on to Hindustan, his heart intoxicated with the sweetest love, and poured it out in fiery songs under the balmy sky, so that a thousand hearts bowed to him, and the good news sprang up with a thousand branches. Soon after the singer's departure, his precious life was made a sacrifice for the deep fall of man. He died in his youth, torn away from his beloved world, from his weeping mother, and his trembling friends. His lovely mouth emptied the dark cup of unspeakable woes, in ghastly fear the birth of the new world drew near. Hard he wrestled with the terrors of old death. Heavy lay the weight of the old world upon him. Yet once more he looked fondly at his mother, then came the releasing hand of eternal love, and he fell asleep. Only a few days hung a deep veil over the roaring sea, over the quaking land - countless tears wept his loved ones - the mystery was unsealed - heavenly spirits heaved the ancient stone from the gloomy grave. Angels sat by the sleeper, delicately shaped from his dreams, awoken in new godlike glory; he climbed the limits of the new-born world, buried with his own hand the old corpse in the abandoned hollow, and with a hand almighty laid upon it a stone which no power shall ever again raise.

Yet weep thy loved ones tears of joy, tears of feeling and endless thanksgiving over your grave - joyously startled, they see thee rise again, and themselves with thee - behold thee weep with sweet fervour on the blessed bosom of thy mother, solemnly walking with thy friends, uttering words plucked as from the tree of life; see thee hasten, full of longing, into thy father's arms, bearing with thee youthful humanity, and the inexhaustible cup of the golden future. Soon the mother hastened after thee in heavenly triumph; she was the first with thee in the new home. Since then, long ages have flowed past, and in ever-increasing splendour have stirred your new creation, and thousands have, away from pangs and tortures, followed thee, filled with faith and longing and fidelity, walking about with thee and the heavenly virgin in the kingdom oflove, serving in the temple of heavenly Death, and forever thine.

Uplifted is the stone –
And all mankind is risen –
We all remain thine own.
And vanished is our prison.
All troubles flee away
Thy golden bowl before,
For earth and life give way
At the last and final supper.

To the marriage death doth call –
The virgins stand back –
The lamps burn lustrous all –
Of oil there is no lack –

If the distance would only fill
With the sound of you walking alone
And that the stars would call
Us all with human tongues and tone.

Unto thee, O Mary
A thousand hearts aspire.
In this life of shadows
Thee only they desire.
In thee they hope for delivery
With visionary expectation –
If only thou, O holy being
Could clasp them to thy breast.

With bitter torment burning,
So many who are consumed
At last from this world turning
To thee have looked and fled,
Helpful thou hast appeared
To so many in pain.
Now to them we come,
To never go out again.

At no grave can weep
Any who love and pray.
The gift of love they keep,
From none can it be taken away.
To soothe and quiet his longing,
Night comes and inspires –
Heaven's children round him thronging
Watch and guard his heart.

Have courage, for life is striding
To endless life along;
Stretched by inner fire,
Our sense becomes transfigured.
One day the stars above
Shall flow in golden wine,
We will enjoy it all,
And as stars we will shine.

The love is given freely,
And separation is no more.
The whole life heaves and surges
Like a sea without a shore.
Just one night of bliss –
One everlasting poem –
And the sun we all share
Is the face of God.

6

Longing for Death

Into the bosom of the earth,
Out of the light's dominion,
Death's pains are but a bursting forth,
Sign of glad departure.
Swift in the narrow little boat,
Swift to the heavenly shore we float.

Blessed be the everlasting night,
And blessed the endless slumber.
We are heated by the day too bright,
And withered up with care.
We're weary of a life abroad,
And we now want our Father's home.

What in this world should we all
Do with love and with faith?
That which is old is set aside,
And the new may perish also.
Alone he stands and sore downcast
Who loves with pious warmth the past.

The past where the light of the senses
In lofty flames did rise;
Where the Father's face and hand
All men did recognize;
And, with high sense, in simplicity
Many still fit the original pattern.

The past wherein, still rich in bloom,
Man's strain did burgeon glorious,
And children, for the world to come,
Sought pain and death victorious,
And, through both life and pleasure spake,
Yet many a heart for love did break.

The past, where to the flow of youth
God still showed himself,
And truly to an early death
Did commit his sweet life.
Fear and torture patiently he bore
So that he would be loved forever.

With anxious yearning now we see
That past in darkness drenched,
With this world's water never we
Shall find our hot thirst quenched.
To our old home we have to go
That blessed time again to know.

What yet doth hinder our return
To loved ones long reposed?
Their grave limits our lives.
We are all sad and afraid.
We can search for nothing more –
The heart is full, the world is void.

Infinite and mysterious,
Thrills through us a sweet trembling –
As if from far there echoed thus
A sigh, our grief resembling.
Our loved ones yearn as well as we,
And sent to us this longing breeze.

Down to the sweet bride, and away
To the beloved Jesus.
Have courage, evening shades grow gray
To those who love and grieve.
A dream will dash our chains apart,
And lay us in the Father's lap.

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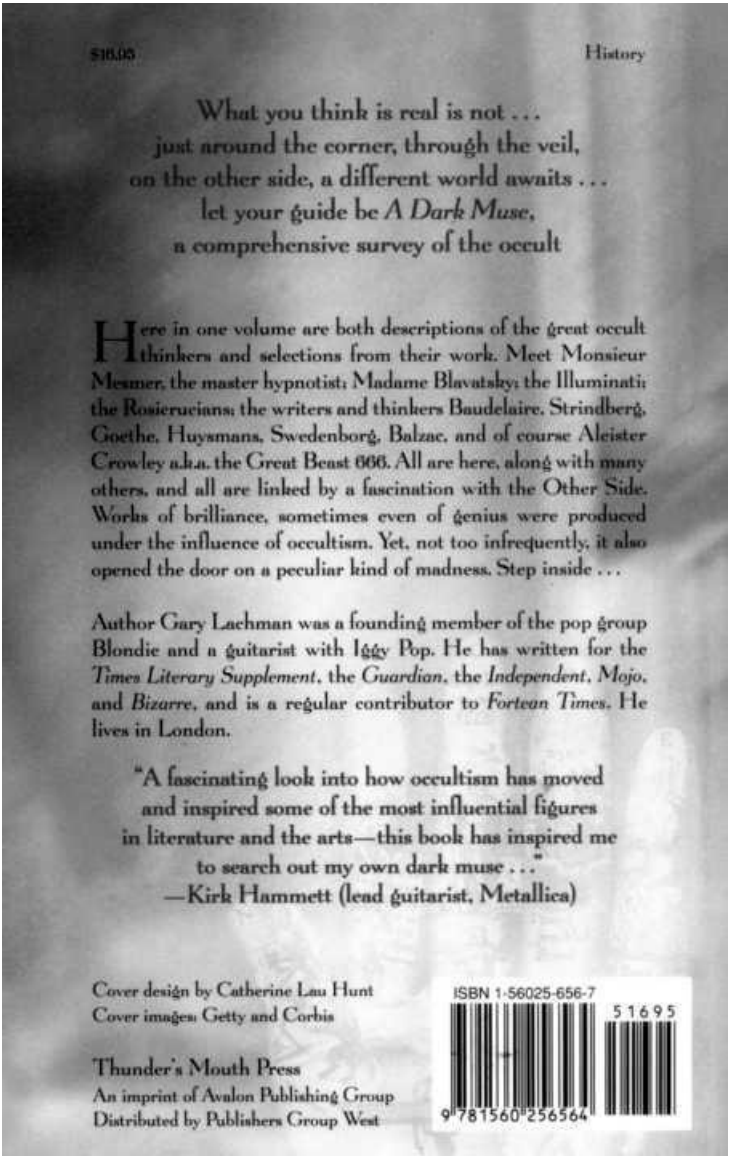
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Author Gary Lachman was a founding member of the pop group Blondie and a guitarist with Iggy Pop. He has written for the Times Literary Supplement, the Guardian, the Independent, Mojo, and Bizarre, and is a regular contributor to Fortean Times. He lives in London.
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